



# Sleeping Beauties in Victorian Britain

Cultural, Literary and Artistic Explorations of a Myth

Béatrice Laurent (ed.)

Peter Lang

# Cultural Interactions: Studies in the Relationship between the Arts

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Artists, scientists and the wider public of the Victorian era all seem to have shared a common interest in the myth of the Briar Rose and its contemporary implications, from the Pre-Raphaelites and late Victorian aesthetes to the fascinated crowds who visited Ellen Sadler, the real-life ‘Sleeping Maid’ who is reported to have slept from 1871 to 1880.

The figure of the beautiful reclining female sleeper is a recurring theme in the Victorian imagination, invoking visual, literary and erotic connotations that contribute to a complex range of readings involving aesthetics, gender definitions and contemporary medical opinion. This book compiles and examines a corpus of Sleeping Beauties drawn from Victorian medical reports, literature and the arts and explores the significance of the enduring revival of the myth.

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# Sleeping Beauties in Victorian Britain

CULTURAL INTERACTIONS  
Studies in the Relationship between the Arts

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Edited by J.B. Bullen

Volume 33



PETER LANG

Oxford • Bern • Berlin • Bruxelles • Frankfurt am Main • New York • Wien

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To these individuals and institutions goes my deepest gratitude.

The authors of this volume sympathize with Cristina Pascu-Tulbure who wishes to dedicate her article to her late husband Petre.



BÉATRICE LAURENT

## Introduction

This book contains a series of ten papers that explore the relationships between medical assumptions, literary renderings and pictorial presentations of a single theme: the sleeping woman in Victorian Britain. Most result from a fruitful seminar on that topic that was held at the European Society for the Study of English conference in Istanbul in September 2012. Using an interdisciplinary approach, this two-day event brought together academics specializing in Victorian studies but with varied research interests ranging from literature and the arts to cultural history.

A web search of Victorian periodicals with the keywords 'Sleeping Beauty' through the six decades 1840 to 1900 returns an impressively high, although irregular, number of entries, the lowest being five for 1845, the highest 424 for 1891. Although some of these entries come from the sport section, with news concerning the racehorse called Sleeping Beauty, most belong to the news or entertainment categories and advertise or report various performances of cantatas, pantomimes, musicals or extravaganzas. Occasional papers deal with paintings by Daniel Maclise or Edward Burne-Jones. The web survey shows a progression in the popularity of the legend from an average of 55 entries per year in the mid-Victorian period, a sharp rise to 98 entries per year in the 1870s, a towering average of 163 throughout the 1880s and a modest decline in the last decade of the century with 146 entries on average per year. These results confirm that the mid- and even more the late Victorian public were familiar with the fairy tale and enjoyed the representations of beautiful female sleepers. Some Sleeping Beauty shows targeted a juvenile audience, especially during the holiday season, but many addressed adults. Such was the case of the 'Sleeping Beauty in the Wood' at the Polytechnic Institution in London, in which 'Mr George Buckland recites the "argument" which deals very freely in

allusions to topics of the day and sings several songs with good effect'.<sup>1</sup> This show was so popular that it ran for over five years, from 1872 till 1877. A more scholarly approach to folktales was being pursued by 'storiologists' who sought to discover remains of a primeval common Aryan culture. For instance, William Ralston Shedden-Ralston, a noted scholar and translator of Russian tales, wrote that

No loftier origin, no more venerable parentage, can be assigned to any form of literature than that which is ascribed to folk-tales by scholars who recognise in them 'heirlooms of the Aryan family'; who consider that they have been independently developed by the various branches of the family, from mythological germs which existed in the minds of our primaeval ancestors, while they still inhabited their ancient home in the highlands of Central Asia. Viewed in this light, such a story as that of the Sleeping Beauty may well inspire a respect bordering upon veneration. In the world's morning-time, before the religious instincts of our ancestors had taken distinct shape or found articulate utterance, the idea may well have occurred to some of the more poetic among them that the revival of the earth in Spring resembled an awakening from sleep. And from this simile may have sprung a legend of a maiden who slept through a space of time corresponding with or typical of the length of the winter season, and who then awoke to active life and enjoyment.<sup>2</sup>

This interpretation of tales as nature narratives was shared by John Ruskin in his 1868 introduction to the Grimms' tales, and Ralston was popular enough both as a story-teller and as a scholar to be invited to Marlborough House to entertain the little princes and princesses and to deliver public lectures on 'The Mythology of Fairy Tales'.

While the success of the 'Sleeping Beauty' as a tale can be ascribed to the renewed interest in folk culture and that of its staged adaptations can be attributed to the visual opportunities it offered to display scores of reclining female bodies, the enduring success of the eponymous character as a subject in art and literature has yet to be fully analysed. The following chapters will examine it in the framework of medical, gender and psychoanalytical theories. This book will focus mostly on how, when

1 *Daily News* (2 April 1872).

2 William Ralston Shedden-Ralston, *Notes on Folk-tales* (Scotland: s.n., 1878), 3–4.

and why the Sleeping Beauty became so popular in the second half of the nineteenth century. Some of the questions we address are the following: why was there such a proliferation of 'Sleeping Beauties' in late Victorian art? How were the emerging neurosciences involved in the gendering and interpretation of prolonged sleep? What was the impact of the fairy tale on the Victorian imagination?

The essays in this volume have been arranged in three broad sections – culture, literature and art – each impinging on the other two. The first two chapters offer a general cultural overview of sleeping in Victorian times. Muriel Adrien studies the effect of biphasic sleep and speculates on how the progressive shift to the consolidated eight-hour sleep affected the experience of this natural function. By transforming a natural, personal and variable experience – a space of freedom – into a standardized process, did the Victorians not invent pathological sleep? Indeed, in her paper, Béatrice Laurent shows that non-standard sleep was the object of great medical attention and heated debates. Protracted sleepers who in earlier times would have been worshipped as living miracles were now suspected of fraud and subjected to various treatments including bleedings, galvanism and hypnotherapy.

Obviously, medical literature was permeable to other forms of literature, as is attested by the Pickwickian syndrome which was named after the character of Joe, the Fat Boy who pops up and keeps falling asleep at odd times and in odd places in Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*. Conversely, science impacted on fiction, as it will be demonstrated in the chapter by Laurence Talairach-Vielmas on Dickens's Miss Havisham, which shows how the author of *Great Expectations* was influenced by medical theories and their visual illustrations in the form of anatomical wax displays. The two following chapters are literary explorations of feminine writings. In her essay on Anne Thackeray Ritchie, Manuela D'Amore shows how this understudied author used old fairy tales to tackle present-day social and gender issues, even though her stance was a rather consensual one. According to Stefania Arcara, however, female sleepers should not be equated with submissive victims of Victorian patriarchy. In a stimulating new reading of the famous poet and artist Elizabeth Siddal, for instance, Arcara suggests that Siddal's invalidism and reliance on narcotics and her use of sleep and death imagery

can be understood as silent forms of rebellion which ultimately opened to her the doors of freedom.

The third and last section of this book is concerned with artistic interpretations of the myth, and Elizabeth Siddal will be discussed again as a muse and model to her husband, the painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti. In her contribution, Laurence Roussillon-Constanty shows how the 'Sleeping Beauty' trope runs through Rossetti's work and resonates with issues such as female sexuality, insomnia, drug addiction and spiritualism. Moving from the Rossettis to a wider Pre-Raphaelite circle, the next chapter deals with John Ruskin and Edward Burne-Jones. With subtle psychological insight, Cristina Pascu-Tulbure suggests that both men were confronted in different ways by the loss of a loved one and 'aestheticized' their grief as well as more obscure desires by crystallizing them in the acceptable form of the mythical sleeping princess. The Pre-Raphaelites' influence was immense in Victorian Britain, and Marie Cordié-Levy meticulously analyses it in the photographic work of Julia Margaret Cameron. This impact is perceived in terms of subjects and compositions that contributed to create a new femininity. In art, the figure of the sleeper offered the advantage of long and relatively tireless sitting sessions. That was particularly important for the first photographers who had to keep their models perfectly still, without even the beat of an eyelash, for several minutes. Various interpretations as a proof of innocence or a suspicious withdrawal in an inner world, feminine sleep has been an object of fascination and enquiry since antiquity. It is therefore unsurprising that the subject appears in the Neoclassical and Aesthetic artistic movements of the second half of the nineteenth century. Anne-Florence Gillard-Estrada explores late Victorian paintings in the light of anthropological and psychological research to trace the impact of the contemporary interest in the mechanisms of dreams and of the subconscious by identifying within specific paintings notions such as archaic pulses, erotic fantasies, fears of degeneracy or the return of the repressed.

What concerns this volume is feminine sleep, and the way in which the innocent sleeper from the fairy tale became a desirable model of femininity to both male and female public. It was popularized by the translation into English of the Grimm and Andersen collections of folk tales, the spectacles of *tableaux vivants*, and paintings from major artists. The sleeping girl



became fashionable because she connoted innocence as well as leisure. As a prerogative of the affluent classes, sleep became, like ornamental women, an ostentatious sign of success. No wonder then that these signs coalesced into the figure of the Sleeping Beauty to signify financial security. But there were other, perhaps less easily identifiable reasons for the fashion. Drawing on stage performances and painting, artistically staged photographs of beautiful sleepers – occasionally representing dead bodies – nourished the viewers' memories, desires and fantasies. Because sleep is connected with the invisible, the representation of an apparently sleeping subject elevates the artwork from a mere anatomical or portrait study and invites the viewer to ponder the unexpressed interior life of dreams and psyche or the afterlife. Sometimes, the dreamer and her dreams are represented in a single work. This simultaneous inspection of the visible and invisible is all the more possible as the sleeping model is unaware of the spectator's gaze, therefore giving him or her the freedom to project erotic fantasies upon her painted or photographed figure. In a *mise en abyme* process, the painted sleeper becomes herself the object of the artist's and the viewer's dreams.

While the papers assembled in this book do not cover the whole spectrum of possible analyses of the subject, I do hope that the hermeneutic investigations they propose will encourage readers, scholars and art connoisseurs to view differently a familiar Victorian trope.



MURIEL ADRIEN

## What Did Victorian Sleeping Beauties Dream of? About the Great Number of Representations of Sleep in the Late Nineteenth Century

The purpose of this article is to try to understand why there were so many paintings that dealt with the theme of sleep in the late nineteenth century, what preoccupations of the time they reflected and what this trend anticipated in terms of the evolution of painting. One of the contextual reasons accounting for such an interest was the gradual shift from the dominant pattern of segmented sleep to our contemporary pattern of sleep. Since time immemorial and until the nineteenth century, biphasic sleep prevailed (meaning two four-hour blocks with an interlude in between) and it was replaced during the Industrial Revolution by contemporary seamless, continuous eight-hour sleep routine. Meanwhile, the successive medical theories on dreams, each probing deeper into various states of consciousness and bringing to the fore new understanding about man's inner self, are also keys to the dreams that haunt these paintings. Moreover, as they were motionless, the depicted sleeping women were reminiscent of bodies under perusal for medical research, and as such, reified into new objects of study.

The fact that the portrayed sleepers were mostly women of course induces gendered readings on women as objects of contemplation and desire, fantasized by the Victorian mind as idealized mute and yet potentially threatening sexualized beings. When represented sleeping, they were reassuringly reduced to passive bodies lying still. These unmoving bodies went hand in hand with other pictures that flourished in the Victorian age: last portraits. Sleep was akin to lifelessness, according to many medical hypotheses, and the photographs of the deceased influenced or were influenced by representations of sleepers.

Lastly, sleeping bodies with shut eyes resonate with metapictorial issues, that of the blind artist, that of images as inert matter in need to be awakened, that of their foreshadowing power like that of dreams. Significantly, this interest in sleep – which is contemporary with the development of photography – is also concomitant with the decline of figurative painting.

## The Interest in Sleep

### *The former biphasic sleep pattern*

According to the sleep historian Roger Ekirch, author of *At Day's Close: Night in Times Past*,<sup>1</sup> the consolidated, compressed sleep we experience nowadays was not common practice in the nineteenth century and in pre-industrial times, before electricity and gaslight. Humans slept in two four-hour blocks, which were separated by a period of wakefulness in the middle of the night, which lasted an hour or more. In the past, and especially during winter, darkness spanned up to fourteen hours each night. Except for those affluent enough to burn candles for hours, people were left with little to do but crawl into bed early, and this gave a great deal of flexibility to their nightly sleep requirements.

Ekirch has found more than 500 archival documents – court statements, diaries and letters, in English, French, and Italian from before the thirteenth century through the nineteenth century – that refer to a ‘first sleep’ that was followed by what was called the ‘watch’, before a ‘second sleep’, another few hours of slumber until daybreak. In between the two, in the dark of night, there was an extraordinary level of activity. People routinely rose to urinate, smoke, read, chat, and even visit close neighbours. They tended to their animals, checked on their livestock, brought in the cows or did housekeeping, stoked the fire, prepared the next day’s meal. They might

1 Roger Ekirch, *At Day's Close: Night in Times Past* (New York: Norton, 2005).

pilfer, rob the nearby orchard or slip out to poach. The interval was also a haven for prayer, reflection, and meditation. Fragmentation of sleep made people more responsive to the subconscious, as they mulled over and pondered on dreams, a significant source of inspiration and self-awareness.

This relatively quiet intermission, this creative window closed gradually during the nineteenth century. As gas lamps and inexpensive artificial light became common, people stayed awake long after sundown, and were productive late into the night, but were so chronically sleep-deprived that they usually slept for seven uninterrupted hours nightly. Industrial times therefore shifted sleeping habits from two sleeping episodes to a consolidated eight hours.

Ekirch's findings match those of scientists at the National Institute of Mental Health in Washington, DC in the 1990s, who found that, with light mimicking the duration of day and night during winter and without the interference of artificial light, many people naturally slept in two phases. The sleep scientist Thomas Wehr concluded that biphasic sleeping is the most natural sleep pattern, and not a form of insomnia with abnormal nocturnal awakenings. Many of today's sleeping disorders are essentially due to these former primal habits.<sup>2</sup>

Many nineteenth-century paintings may reflect a new interest brought up by this change in sleeping patterns, which, incidentally, is contemporary with pastoral nostalgia, or at least with the apprehensions linked to the transformations generated by industrialization. Moreover, the very electricity that induced the new sleeping pattern and upset the circadian cycle was that which could act on the nervous system. At any rate, sleepers could now be seen and therefore depicted, since electric light allowed people to see at night.

- 2 People with particularly strong circadian rhythms continue to wake up in the night, according to Ekirch, because this biological pattern is still operating. As observed by anthropologists, many people in parts of the world where artificial light has not arrived sleep in segmented periods, such as the Tiv group in Central Nigeria.

### *The medico-scientific context*

Sleep was the subject of much attention in the nineteenth-century scientific world. True, obstructive sleep apnoea was first described not by a clinical doctor, but by Charles Dickens in 1836 in *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*.<sup>3</sup> But although Locke had written that dreams were the result of brain malfunction and did not deserve to be studied, in the nineteenth century, dreams – more so even than sleep – were credited by hypnologists for being active and purposeful processes related to memory, somatic and mental activity; and hypnosis was all the rage.<sup>4</sup> *Sleep and Dreams* by Alfred Maury,<sup>5</sup> *The Life of Dreams* by Karl Scherner,<sup>6</sup> both published in 1861, followed by Hervey de Saint-Denys's book, *Les Rêves et les moyens de les diriger, observations pratiques* in 1867,<sup>7</sup> culminated with Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) which linked dreams with repressed sexual impulses.

### *Man, an object of study*

As human beings became objects of study, under observation, they were reified, as exemplified by the body prints made by Charcot and his assistants at the end of the nineteenth century. In *The Rose Bower*,<sup>8</sup> the geometric lay-out – with the graphic play on triangles, rectangles and orthogonal axes

3 Dickens depicted an excessively sleepy, overweight boy named Joe who snored and may have had right-sided heart failure. Obstructive sleep apnoea was thereafter called the 'Pickwickian syndrome.' However, OSA was not recognized as a clinical disorder until nearly a hundred years later.

4 It was resorted to by Charcot, for instance, to cure hysterical women at the Salpêtrière.

5 His experiments bore out that dreams resulted from acoustic, optical and somatic stimulations, and he put forward the idea that dreams last only a very short time.

6 As forerunner of Freud, he stressed the sexual and somatic dimension of dreams.

7 In *Les Rêves et les moyens de les diriger, observations pratiques* (1867), Hervey de Saint-Denys declared that mental activity went on during sleep and could even be influenced with a little bit of practice.

8 Edward Burne-Jones (1833–98). *The Rose Bower* (1890). Oil on canvas. Buscot Park, Oxfordshire.

placed according to the golden rule – frames the woman who is placed centrally as if under perusal for lab study by anatomists, phrenologists or morphopsychologists.

A testimony of this interest was the widely reported experience of Ellen Sadler (1859 – after 1901), sometimes called ‘The Sleeping Girl of Turville’, who slept during nine years, from 1871 until 1880, after a series of seizures and periods of drowsiness. When Ellen awoke at the age of twenty-one, soon after her mother’s death, she professed to remember nothing of the previous nine years. The cause of Ellen’s illness caused much ink to flow. No clear explanation has ever been given for Ellen’s condition.<sup>9</sup> A similar case had arisen a few years earlier: according to her parents, Sarah Jacobs, a girl from Wales, was miraculously able to fast for very lengthy periods of time. When Sarah died of starvation in 1869, her parents were convicted of manslaughter.

## Gendered Readings

In the paintings where the protagonist is overmastered and subjugated by sleep, the beauties are women, and this of course is conducive to readings along gendered lines.

- 9 The situation drew considerable attention from newspapers, medical professionals and the public. The Sadler family home, known as ‘Sleepy Cottage’, became a tourist attraction. As the years passed by without Ellen waking, it was believed that her illness was caused by her mother’s deliberate drugging or was a hoax, especially as her situation brought in substantial money from visitors’ donations. Another hypothesis has been that she might have suffered from narcolepsy. Apart for slightly stunted growth and a ‘weak eye’, she fully recovered, married and had at least five children.

*On women as objects of contemplation, desire and fear*

As objects of erotic fantasies,<sup>10</sup> sleeping women are a way to minimize the domineering sense of sight and enhance the other usually more subdued senses, sparking the very *à la mode* synaesthesia. Waterhouse's *St Cecilia*,<sup>11</sup> the sleeping blind patroness of musicians, conveys the sense of smell through the flowers, the sense of touch through the texture of her dress, and of course the sense of hearing with the violin and mandolin, the lapping of the sea, the lyrical tempo of the lines drawn by the cypresses and masts.

Of course, more than just sensorial impressions, languishing sleeping women magnetized all sorts of erotic fantasies for would-be Pygmalion artists and a primarily male audience. Private individual bedrooms developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, and the bed then became a locus for sexual activity. Victorian prudish morality issued warnings and advice of all sorts. Nevertheless, gazing at sleeping women was the opportunity of piercing the secret of boudoirs' alcoves.

In spite of its stable and assertive geometric composition and its restful, peaceful, idyllic context, *The Rose Bower* by Edward Burne-Jones slips in

- 10 A literary example of the relationship between sleep and eroticism is the poem 'Love and Sleep' (1866), by Algernon Charles Swinburne:

Lying asleep between the strokes of night  
 I saw my love lean over my sad bed,  
 Pale as the duskiest lily's leaf or head,  
 Smooth-skinned and dark, with bare throat made to bite,  
 Too wan for blushing and too warm for white,  
 But perfect-coloured without white or red.  
 And her lips opened amorously, and said—  
 I wist not what, saving one word—Delight  
 And all her face was honey to my mouth,  
 And all her body pasture to mine eyes;  
 The long lithe arms and hotter hands than fire,  
 The quivering flanks, hair smelling of the south,  
 The bright light feet, the splendid supple thighs  
 And glittering eyelids of my soul's desire.

- 11 John William Waterhouse (1849–1917). *St Cecilia* (1895). Oil on canvas, 196 × 117 cm. Private collection.



the quicksand of Victorian ambivalence. The unaffected, idealized, remote, celestial woman tallies with the Victorian cliché of the unattainable, quasi divine icon, underscored by her upper and haloed position. The virginal white of her dress refers to her essential virtue, whose intimacy the spectator cannot but guess at – hence the voyeuristic dimension of the painting. Indeed, the enthralling *jeune fille en fleur* seems as fresh as if she had just got into bed, and the dark curtain highlights the clear, milky and pearly tones of flesh, that we imagine warm and velvety, as well as her russet lusty-coloured hair mane. The texture of the dress enables the viewers to make out her body's shape, somewhat unveiling her nudity. The thick and rampant rosebush is just as erotically suggestive, and the precious woods, heavy cloths and elegant draperies stir and gratify the viewers' senses.

In a similar vein, the magnum opus of Leighton, *Flaming June*,<sup>12</sup> is a tribute to the slumbering voluptuous and opulent women of Giorgione and Titian, meant to excite and arouse the senses. Under the horizontal multi-layered composition (the horizon, the ledge of the parapet, the seatback), the serpentine lines of the convoluted female body and of her long and flowing hair fuse with the curves of the draperies. The mesmerizing woman is lascivious and alluring like a sunny mature fruit. The lavish flamboyant bright orange fabric set against its complementary soft band of blue in the background makes her glow from the inside. She looks on fire, with a burning sensuality, as is suggested by her Rapunzel-like untangled hair under the shining sea. The carnal-coloured objects around her are like extensions of her limbs and blood. The whole environment partakes of this sensual atmosphere: the softly rounded wooden frame of the sofa bed looks like skin, and the flowers are blood-red. The pose and the semi-nudity of the woman – with her transparent gown, the folds of her see-through dress, and her bare feet – reveal more than they conceal. The seeming need for contact – the head rests on her shoulder and her right hand is on her left arm – suggests a very flexible animal feline grace and compels the viewer

12 Frederic Leighton (1830–96). *Flaming June* (c.1895). Oil on poplar wood, 120.6 × 120.6 cm. Ponce Museum of Art, Puerto Rico.

to gaze in wonder at the rapturous and gorgeous beauty.<sup>13</sup> The exotic foreignness of her bewitching allure is also meant to evince the threat posed by the female species.

As a way to defuse the threat posed by women, *Titania Sleeping*<sup>14</sup> by Richard Dadd (1841) illustrates Act II, scene ii of Shakespeare's play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where Titania is lulled to sleep by her fairy attendants. Oberon, her jealous husband, whose figure is almost hidden in the shadows of the cave, is concocting a magic flower juice, which, when poured on Titania's eyelids, will make her fall in love with the first creature she will come upon, a donkey-man called Bottom. Titania recalls a Madonna in a niche amongst swirling figures in a spiral snail's shell shape. The tightness of the structure and the complete integration of the figures framed within a proscenium arch create the feeling of a self-contained microcosm in a recess, existing entirely on its own terms and in its own context, as in a dream. Oberon strategically intends to defuse the threats that a dreaming woman represents, by taking control of her fantasies and directing her erotic yearnings towards an ass-headed creature. Having women sleep neutralizes the potential dangers of hidden female forces ready to burst forth.

Sleeping women that are associated with transgressive forms of sexuality existed in the art of every European country. In Italy, for instance, *The Punishment of Lust* by Segantini<sup>15</sup> shows women floating against a snowy background, as if they were sleeping in the air. The spirits of the women are punished for having committed the sin of abortion consciously or by neglect. In France, *Sleep*<sup>16</sup> by Courbet, commissioned by the Turkish diplomat Khalil-Bey for his very private collection which included *The Origin of*

13 For an analysis of this painting, see Béatrice Laurent, *La Peinture anglaise* (Nantes: Editions du Temps, 2006), 146–51.

14 Richard Dadd (1817–86). *Titania Sleeping* (1841). Oil on canvas, 64.8 × 77.5 cm.

15 Giovanni Segantini (1858–99). *The Punishment of Lust* (1891). Oil on canvas, 97.5 × 171 cm. Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

16 *Sleep* (1866). Oil on canvas, 135 × 200 cm. Belongs to the Musée du Petit Palais, on loan in the Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

*the World*,<sup>17</sup> celebrates the licentious themes of female nudity and lesbianism, very close in its format to Manet's notorious *Olympia*.

Before or contemporary with the New Woman, masculine versions of sleeping beauties were ways to avenge women's condition, although they are few and far between. A case in point is the representation of Endymion, the archetypal lascivious nude shepherd, put to sleep by Zeus, as Selene, the goddess of the moon, had asked him, so that he could remain forever young, and with whom she had fifty children. Another revenge of sleeping women is the emasculating operation carried out by Salome and her sisters on a male sleeper, St John the Baptist in this particular case.

### *On the passivity of women*

Nevertheless, the sleeping women more obviously hark back to the theme of the *Dormition of the Virgin*. And in so doing, they refer to the cliché of the Victorian mute, walled-in woman, shut in her silence and abnegation, who was denied any kind of personal will, control, and sexuality apart from a Prince's kiss who aroused her only to marry her and have children, as in the spellbound characters of Snow White or Sleeping Beauty. That was supposed to make her live happily ever after. Burne-Jones had a long-standing interest in the story of Sleeping Beauty which occupied him for almost thirty years. He drew his inspiration for *The Briar Rose* series<sup>18</sup>

17 Gustave Jean-Désiré Courbet (1819–77). *The Origin of the World* (1866). Oil on canvas, 46 × 55 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

18 In 1890, Burne-Jones completed his *Briar Rose* series, four large pictures illustrating the story of Sleeping Beauty. He first did a tile panel of the story in 1864. Later, in 180 he did a small series of oil paintings for William Graham. In 1890 (nearly thirty years after the first series), Burne-Jones created the large set of four oil paintings that told the story of Sleeping Beauty. The paintings were bought by Agnew & Sons for £15,000 and exhibited in their gallery. The series of the spellbound sleepers was very popular with public and critics alike, who reportedly responded to the pictures with immense enthusiasm amounting to ecstasy. William Morris composed verses to accompany each of the paintings. The lazy arabesques of the briars, the abandoned

from Charles Perrault's version of the fairy tale, and from Tennyson's poem 'Day Dream' (1842), even though there is no narrative progression in the cycle, for Burne-Jones's primary concern was to suggest a mood of sleeping languor. The leitmotiv of the woman who must not yield to her passions but observe rules set by a paternalistic society was not limited to England. For instance, *The Dream* by Zola published in 1888 focused on the theme of women who are martyrs to love passions which their families did not agree to.

Popular ideas about sleep as related to high or low blood pressure in the brain, or to body vapours and juices could promptly be connected with women's biological cycles and languor. Other hypotheses which claimed that sleep was caused by a lack of oxygen to the brain or an accumulation of toxic substances justified the choice of women in the representation of slumberers, as they were thought to be more feeble-minded than men. One type of neural theory on what caused sleep by the mid-nineteenth century was that neurons were paralyzed during sleep, preventing communication between other nerve cells.<sup>19</sup> Paralysis, the draining of life blood and lack of oxygen: all this spelled out restraint, self-denial, disowning all feeling and smothering expression. Women were put to sleep and silenced, as mere hollow ornamental shells deprived of voice and say. The pictures of sleeping women are coeval with the development of images of lying deceased persons, death being both an escape route from a male-dominated world and the embodiment of women's entrapment.

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poses of the sleeping figures, the shallow perspective, the intense but modulated colours interact with William Morris's verses inscribed beneath.

19 Only in 1929 was it noticed that the brain was not inhibited during sleep.

## Links with Death

Hypnos and Thanatos were brothers and Waterhouse painted them very much alike.<sup>20</sup> In the same vein, Baudelaire in his poem about his 'dear indolent creature' speaks of a 'macabre nymph'. A journalist used terms very explicitly related to death when describing his visit to Ellen Sadler: 'the feet and legs [are] like those of a dead child, almost ice cold ... [...] ... her eyes and cheeks were sunken, and the appearance was that of death.'<sup>21</sup> The sleeping creatures emanate both animation and lifelessness, both decomposition and morphogenesis.

### *Statuesque bodies*

In the paintings, the moulded shapes of these sleeping beauties are reminiscent of statues, especially those imbued with contemporary Hellenic influence.<sup>22</sup> The antique inspiration can be seen for instance in the garments

20 John William Waterhouse (1849–1917), *Sleep and his Half-Brother Death* (1874). Oil on canvas, 70 × 91 cm.

21 'Her breathing was regular and natural, the skin soft and the body warm, as in a healthy subject; the pulse rather fast. The hands were small and thin, but the fingers quite flexible; the body somewhat emaciated; the feet and legs like those of a dead child, almost ice cold ... the aspect of her features was pleasant, more so than might be expected under the circumstances ... her eyes and cheeks were sunken, and the appearance was that of death ... but although there was no colour on her cheeks, the paleness was not that heavy hue which betokens death', Rebecca J. Gurney, 'The Sleeping Girl of Turville' (Buckinghamshire Family History Society, 2006). In <<http://www.paranormalpeopleonline.com/the-sleeping-girl-of-turville-a-real-life-sleeping-beauty/>>.

22 This growing interest in the Hellenic civilization was due to the widely read classical texts (Virgil, Homer, Horatio ...), the recent archaeological discoveries (Pompeii, Herculaneum), the publications that ensued, the tours to Italy and Greece that increased with the development of transportation. Not only were Ancient Greece and Rome considered as exotic *loci* at a time when exoticism was all the rage, but

(turban, draperies, laced shoes) both creatures wear in Evelyn de Morgan's *Night and Sleep*,<sup>23</sup> in the white robes and in the graphic and balanced composition of *St Cecilia*, but also in *Flaming June*, whose name can allude to Juno, the patron goddess of the Roman Empire.

Resemblance was thus petrified, mortified, as in former effigies where bodies were cast so that viewers could cast looks on them. The cenotaph effigy to the dead Prince Albert unveiled at Windsor by a grieving Queen Victoria resembles a recumbent knight, a sleeping Arthur. The deceased were as easy to photograph as statues. One of the purposes of the daguerreotype was close to that of the mortuary mask.

### *The last portrait: 'Tombe de sommeil'*

The golden age of the last portrait was the nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup> Portraits of departed persons were commissioned during the short time frame between their death and their placement in coffin. The funeral masks and the pictorial or photographic representations of great men (Marat, Napoléon, Géricault, Victor Hugo by Victor Tournachon, Rodin) acted as post-mortem relics and contributed to their cult. This phenomenon was coeval with statuomania, the development of elegies (so-called *tombeaux littéraires* or laments) and the growing secularization. The deathbed – whether filled with flowers and bouquets or not – also became a relic

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they were also both models of prosperity and anti-models in that Britain feared to end up in the same way as decadent Rome. Leighton indulged in Greco-Roman references, especially after 1860, but so did other painters, including Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836–1912), Edward John Poynter (1836–1919), Albert Moore (1841–93), John William Godward (1861–1922), John William Waterhouse (1849–1917).

23 Evelyn de Morgan (1855–1919), *Night and Sleep* (1878). Oil on canvas. The De Morgan centre, London.

24 The fashion for the last portrait disappeared in the 1910s, perhaps as a result of the war engaging too many corpses and involving whole nations rather than specific individuals.

in itself. The morgue was a public place, at least in Paris,<sup>25</sup> where visitors would come and gaze at the semi-denuded corpses, at times encouraging necrophilia vagaries in this repressed and bridled society, such as those described by the novelist Edith Cooper.

In England, these doloristic representations took place in a bereaved nation mourning the death of the Prince Consort.

The omnipresent photographs of deceased persons certainly rubbed off on painting, especially as the traces of agony were often erased and the people were represented as if they were sleeping.<sup>26</sup> In this to and fro movement, some photographs were also influenced by painting, such as the Ophelia-like photos of the unknown girl of the Seine (*L'Inconnue de la Seine*) who had been fished out of the river in the late 1880s. The morgue attendant was so taken with her beauty and poignant expression that he called for a mask to be made. Factories were contracted to churn out copies, and on her mask were later projected all sorts of pictorial<sup>27</sup> and literary fantasies, including an English novel in 1898.

Many paintings depicting sleep or death are steeped in ambivalence. Water creatures such as Ophelia and the Lady of Shalott may be sleeping for all we know. The very wide depiction of narcotic poppies (red poppies [*papaver rhoeas*] as well as white poppies [*papaver somniferum*]) hint at

25 The *Morgue*, situated at the tip of the Ile de la Cité, in Paris, was open to anybody who wished to visit, officially so as to enable bodies to be identified, but in reality for meretricious reasons, fascination for death, combined with awe in front of the sexuality of the naked bodies. Hundreds of thousands of people from all social classes flocked. Indeed, the fact that everyone had to mingle in one single spot in front of the large department store style windows made one witness label it a 'temple of equality'. In this respect, over there, people were equal in front of death and they were equal in death as well. This is the etymology of the verb in French *morquer* (which means 'to look down on someone haughtily'). In 1877, after a press campaign, the corpses were dressed, and a judge, who was shocked by the immoral character of the place, asked for the place to be closed.

26 Disdéri said that eyes had best be left open to as to give an impression of life (Heran 126). When the deceased children were very young, Nathan G. Burgess recommended to photograph them on their mother's knee as if they were sleeping (Heran 127).

27 Her memory also haunted the surrealists' imagination (Man Ray did some illustrations) (Heran 187).

either out-of-body or hallucinatory experience, or death in case of overdose. Poppies can be found in *Beata Beatrix*,<sup>28</sup> *St Cecilia*, *Lady Lilith*,<sup>29</sup> *Dante's Dream*,<sup>30</sup> *The Awakening of Adonis*,<sup>31</sup> for example. The topos of sleep connected with death was used by Elizabeth Siddal in her own verses. *Flaming June* was painted a year before Leighton's death, and in the otherworldly sunset, the toxic oleander branch in the top right is laden with morbid suggestions. In *The Rose Bower*, even if the dangling and loose postures are yielding to the salutary redemption of sleep and a soft light haloes the scene, the dark curtain in the background blocks the view, as if something suspicious were going on. The white robe like a shroud covering the straight legs, the joined feet, and the corpse-colored flesh, amid the other lamenting women: all this elicits a morbid reading of the picture. The curved body is shaped like a boat reminiscent of The Lady of Shalott's and of Charon's in hell.

## Metapictorial Readings

### *The blind artist*

Hypnos was often represented like a child with eyes hidden by his wings, i.e. an unseeing child, and was portrayed by Simeon Solomon among others.<sup>32</sup>

28 Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–82). *Beata Beatrix* (1864–70). Oil on canvas, 86.4 × 66 cm. Tate Britain, London.

29 Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–82). *Lady Lilith* (1866–8 and 1872–3). Oil on canvas, 96.5 × 85.1 cm. Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington.

30 Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–82). *Dante's Dream* (1871). Oil on canvas, 216 × 312.4 cm. Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

31 John William Waterhouse (1849–1917). *The Awakening of Adonis* (1900). Oil on canvas, 188 × 96 cm. Private collection.

32 The Greek god of sleep Hypnos lived in a cave near the source of Lethe, the river of forgetfulness along which the poppies of somnolence grew. *Hypnos* by Solomon may have been inspired by the first-century bronze head of Hypnos in the British



According to the *topos* of the blind artist, artistic vision was to be understood as inward rather than outer. Incidentally, in 1868, William Griesinger reported eye movements in association with sleep, REM (rapid eye movement), suggesting visual activity by unseeing eyes. Many pictures feature blind or blindfolded characters meant to demonstrate artistic vision (*The Blind Girl* by Millais,<sup>33</sup> *Sybilla Palmifera* by Rossetti,<sup>34</sup> *Hope* by Watts<sup>35</sup>). In *St Cecilia*, the outside scene looks like an inside one, a moment of piety or prayer, or at least some kind of blissful illuminated intimacy.

### *Why are pictures linked with death?*

Pictures of deceased persons contribute to the mourning process (making an absent dear one present vicariously through his or her representation) and help us face this inevitable end. As Burne-Jones's close friends died in the 1880s, the artist experienced mounting isolation and painful awareness of his own mortality. *The Last Sleep of Arthur in Avalon*<sup>36</sup> became increasingly autobiographical for the artist as he became immersed in his work,<sup>37</sup> identifying with Arthur and even adopting his pose when he

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Museum, but it was also close to Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix* and pictures by European Symbolists such as Redon, Lévy-Dhurmer and particularly Khnopff. *Hypnos, the God of Sleep* is a variant of Solomon's *The Winged and Poppied Sleep* of 1889 (Aberdeen Art Gallery).

- 33 John Everett Millais (1829–96), *The Blind Girl* (1856). Oil on canvas. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham.
- 34 Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–82). *Sybilla Palmifera* (c. 1865–70). Oil on canvas, 98.4 × 85 cm. National Museums, Liverpool (Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight).
- 35 George Frederic Watts (1817–1904). *Hope* (1886). Oil on canvas, 142.2 cm × 111.8 cm. Tate Gallery, London.
- 36 *The Last Sleep of Arthur in Avalon* was painted by Burne-Jones, and started in 1881. The massive painting measures 279 × 650 cm, and is widely considered to be Burne-Jones's magnum opus.
- 37 Towards the end of his life he wrote, 'above all the picture is about silence' and 'I need nothing but my hands and my brain to fashion myself a world to live in that nothing can disturb. In my own land I am king of it'. His widow described *Arthur* as a 'task

slept. Another example of this grieving process was Cogniet's picture of his dead student,<sup>38</sup> with himself behind the easel, devastated by sorrow. This painting also alludes to Tintoret's legendary painting of his deceased daughter.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, artists such as Rossetti, Monet or Delaroche painted their defunct wives.

Images are inert matter: etymologically, the term 'image' comes from *imago*, which is a funereal representation. And some theories say that mimetic painting emerged with the development of effigies.<sup>40</sup> Due to their rigid motionlessness, portraits – especially Neoclassical ones – are reminiscent of the petrification of the deceased. Moreover, portraits give no access to the represented subject, and yet their aura retains something of the lost person. Images deal with a similar issue: the represented object is neither really present, nor is it really absent.

Therefore, images are naturally in the sleep mode. The numerous sleepers are perhaps also a way to reflect, in a metapictorial manner, on the dormant nature of pictures, as sleeping beauties offering their Morphean latency to any viewers ready to wake them up, fluttering and quivering into vibrating life. The metapictorial potential of the *Rose Bower* painting, for instance, was already hinted at by the narcissistic mirror, the canvas-like curtain in the background, the boat-like shaped scene, the framing and *mise en abyme* effects where the point of convergence is also the vanishing point. The in-betweenness where the spellbound women are suspended is a lifelessness which is not death, and is of the same stuff as the painting which pulls us into the mute dreams it triggers in us as viewers. The

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of love to which [the artist] put no limit of time or labor'. <<http://victorianpeeper.blogspot.fr/2008/04/return-of-king-arthur.html>>.

38 Leon Cogniet (1794–1880). *Presumed Self-portrait with his Dead Student* (c.1843). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Orléans.

39 Léon Cogniet (1794–1880). *Tintoretto Paints His Dead Daughter* (1843). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Bordeaux.

40 A theory has it that realism and resemblance in thirteenth-century sculpture emerged with the fashion for the death masks, but this theory has been disputed (see Emile Mâle and Julius von Schlosser. Heran 16).

feelings of abeyance, quiescence, deferment characterize both the women and the painting.

*Putting mimesis to sleep*

Perhaps these numerous pictures of sleep signalled a turning point, the end of a pictorial era and the beginning of a new one, where new styles and aims would dawn, other than the mimetic paintings which had started with the first funereal images.

'We are such stuff as dreams are made on and our little life is rounded with a sleep', says Prospero in *The Tempest*.<sup>41</sup> Biphasic sleeping made it easier to recall and access dreams, affording a pathway to the subconscious. Whether a result of biphasic sleeping or a result of its disappearance, dreams were a significant source of inspiration, be it for and within fairy tales (*Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Pan*, *Goldilocks*, *Tom Thumb*) and other genres, or in paintings. At the end of the nineteenth century, the oneiric inspiration in which painting indulged (*Dream* by Puvis de Chavannes)<sup>42</sup> culminated with the blatant escapism of the French Symbolists, which gave free rein to disquieting fantasies and the return of the repressed. In *Night and Sleep* by Evelyn de Morgan, the androgynous Mercurian figures of Night and Sleep are flying or floating, clutching at one another, free from spatial and temporal frame and gravity, moving as in a dream.

The extensive use of poppies in paintings that represent sleeping women has been mentioned earlier for their potentially deadly nature. Poppies also induced sleep and dreamlike visions. Hypnos provoked sleep

41 'Our revels now are ended. These our actors, as I foretold you, were all spirits, and are melted into air, into thin air: and like the baseless fabric of this vision, the cloud-capp'd tow'rs, the gorgeous palaces, the solemn temples, the great globe itself, Yea, all which it inherits, shall dissolve, and, like this insubstantial pageant faded, leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff as dreams are made on; and our little life is rounded with a sleep.' *The Tempest*, act IV, scene i, 148–58.

42 Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (1824–98). *The Dream* (1883). Oil on canvas, 82 × 102 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

by touching mortals with a poppy stem. Opium was a widely offered treatment for insomnia since ancient Egyptian times and the first hypnotic medication used. Hypnagogic images (for instance in *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* by Goya)<sup>43</sup> are akin to what is envisioned during hallucinatory trances.<sup>44</sup> In the context of the semi-esoteric theories, sleeping women were remote and unattainable maybe because they were overpowered by drugs or dreams as well.<sup>45</sup>

All upheavals and transformations are preceded by a period of withdrawal, introversion and regression as if to gather the necessary gestational forces of renewal, hence the foetal ovoid shape of *Flaming June*. This period is pregnant with all sorts of mystifying representations which often stem from the dreams that explore the potential for change. Hence the oneiric and escapist trend with its hypnagogic images and hallucinatory trances.

These paintings seem to foresee a kind of funereal wake – the beginning of the end. Heavy with past subconscious experience, laden with meaning and forebodings, dreams stage and program future events. An *oneiros*, from which the adjective *oneiric* comes, was a creature who entered a room through the keyhole, and delivered his message to the sleeper. As such, he was close to Hermes, the messenger God, who sometimes replaced Hypnos. In the Bible, many revelations and prophecies are given via dreams. A dream is an answer to a question we haven't yet learned how to ask.<sup>46</sup> At a time

43 Francisco de Goya (1746–1828). *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* (c.1797). Etching, aquatint, drypoint and burin, 21.5 × 15 cm. Prado, Madrid.

44 *Quelques phénomènes du sommeil* (1831) by Charles Nodier involves sensational and hybrid creatures bred by sleepwalking and hypnotic visions. Interest in dreams developed at a time when regulations started prohibiting dream predictors. Ordinance of 14 December 1830. Yves Ripa, *Histoire du rêve, regards sur l'imaginaire des français au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Olivier Orban, 1988).

45 For the way literature drew inspiration from dreams (Nodier, Nerval, Barbey d'Aureville, Musset, Balzac ...), see Albert Béguin, *L'Âme romantique et le rêve, essai sur le romantisme allemand et la poésie française* (Paris: Corti, 1937) or Jacques Bousquet, *Les Thèmes du rêve dans la littérature romantique (France, Angleterre, Allemagne)* (Paris: Didier, 1964).

46 Dreams abound in the Bible, be they Abraham's, Jacob's, Joseph's. Interpretation of dreams in the Middle Ages was brutally interrupted in the twelfth century by the Inquisition.

when figurative painting was about to fall in a deep sleep and sink into oblivion, faced with the competition of photography and the emergence of other pictorial production, these representations probably were the funereal mask of mimetic activity itself. Indeed, photography was encroaching on every pretension to realistic and figurative representation, and this infringement transformed the conditions and status of artistic activity of the twentieth century, and its relation to mimetic illusion.<sup>47</sup>

That figurative art would be shaken in its foundations and fall into deep sleep is perhaps an organic view of art history, with its own chronobiology and circadian clock. At any rate, our history is the history of waking men. But sleeping women may also have something to say. As women longed for a change and as their status was about to evolve, so were pictures. Paintings are akin to these slumped and somnolent figures awaiting the recall to life, to presence. Neither realistic, nor really mythological, *Flaming June* of course anticipates abstract art and the wavy lines and arabesques of Art Nouveau, but even more so looks like a huge sunflower turning to light for nourishment and inspiration.

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47 The pictorial currents that followed tried to deal with movement and include time (luminism with its glitter, Futurism, performances ...) which is the blind spot of all still pictures, and tried to find a way out of their essential motionlessness and static nature. How could this major limit of painting be coped with, this morbid and agonizing finiteness which reflected ours?

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## The Strange Case of the Victorian Sleeping Maid

The names of Margaret Lyall, Sarah Jacobs, Elizabeth Squirrel, Mary Kettle and Ellen Sadler do not evoke anything nowadays: they have vanished from public memory as surely as they entered it in the nineteenth century. Yet, these five girls and women enjoyed a moment of stardom through doing nothing. They were real-life sleeping beauties. I would like to suggest a possible link between sensational cases of prolonged sleep, which in the late eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth century bewildered the public and the medical profession alike, and the renewal of interest in the Sleeping Beauty myth in Victorian Britain.

The historian of science Mark Largent recently underlined the reciprocal relationship between science and context: ‘while various circumstances and perspectives have influenced the evolution of the sciences,’ he writes, ‘scientific disciplines have conversely influenced the contexts within which they developed.’<sup>1</sup> Sleeping Beauty is a case in point, for in the context of the nineteenth century the figure became a complex, in the sense that it involved scientific, cultural, literary and artistic components each resonating with the others.

Even though cases of protracted sleep had been reported in French medical literature since at least 1786,<sup>2</sup> it was a neurologist from Frankfurt,

- 1 Mark A. Largent, ‘Preface’, in John H. Cartwright and Brian Baker, eds, *Literature and Science: Social Impact and Interaction* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO Inc., 2005), xiv.
- 2 Edmé-Pierre Chauvot de Beauchêne, *Observation sur une maladie nerveuse avec complication d’un sommeil, tantôt léthargique, tantôt convulsif* (Amsterdam and Paris: Méquignon l’aîné, 1786).

Dr Willi Kleine,<sup>3</sup> who first described the symptoms of the hypersomnia that was later named after him, in 1925. Between these two dates, the abundance and success of publications on sleep-walking, hypnotism, trance and mesmerism testify to the interest of Western readers throughout the long nineteenth century in sleep theories and sleeping disorders, in sleep-related experiences located on the permeable zone between the medical and the esoteric.

Was the power of scientific discourse so strong that it shaped what we call reality – which is necessarily subjectively apprehended? Or, conversely, was it the newly discovered existence of a long and regularly augmented list of forgotten sleeping girls that oriented scientific research and boosted medical debate and progress? In Britain, the wealth of scientific publications on the topic of sleep, of which I will provide an overview, was accompanied and penetrated by other forms of literature, especially the fairy tale and the Gothic novel, as we will see in the second part, but what seems astonishing is that from the marriage of fiction and medical speculation real-life Sleeping Beauties were born and catapulted into stardom through the persuasive power of the press. Obviously, these cases became the object of heated medical and judicial, increasingly public debates. The present chapter proposes to study the genesis, the narrations and the debates that surrounded the strange cases of Victorian sleeping maids.

In Britain, the 1840–50 decade was particularly rich in books on sleep theory and sleeping disorders. The immensely popular *Philosophy of Sleep* (1830) by the Scottish surgeon Robert Macnish (1802–37) was being posthumously and frequently republished.<sup>4</sup> In 1842 and 1846 were released the

3 It is in reference to Dr Willi Kleine and to the New York psychiatrist Dr Max Levin that the Kleine-Levin Syndrome was defined in the 1950s.

4 Robert Macnish, *The Philosophy of Sleep* (Glasgow: W.R. M'Phun, 1830) went through a second edition in 1834, and a third in 1836 with the same editor; it was then republished in 1838, 1840, 1845, 1850, 1854, 1859, 1862 and 1865; in the United States it was first published in New York by Appleton & Co. in 1834, the 2nd American edition was with Pearson in 1835, subsequent reprints of the 2nd edition with the publishers Andrus & Son came out in 1842, 1843, 1844, 1847 and 1854. *The Philosophy of Sleep* was also accessible in *The Constitution of Man*, a volume of collected works on



first and second editions of *The Anatomy of Sleep, or the Art of Procuring Sound and Refreshing Slumber at Will* by the Jamaican-Scottish physician Edward Binns (1804–51). The ‘father of hypnotism’ James Braid (1795–1860) published his *Neurypnology, or the Rationale of Nervous Sleep* in 1843 and *Observations on Trance or, Human Hybernation* in 1850. The following year, Braid’s disciple, James John Garth Wilkinson (1812–99), the translator of Swedenborg’s works from Latin into English, released the British and American editions of his widely circulated volume on *The Human Body and Its Connection with Man*, which contained several pages on sleep.

These four giant pioneers of sleep research prompted other medical men to examine reports and, when possible, diagnose cases of pathological sleeping patterns in the following decade. In Britain, Arthur E. Durham published several articles in the *Guy’s Hospital Gazette* in 1860 and 1866 to present his theory of blood anemia as the cause of sleep. In 1863 W.G. Gimson, a medical doctor from Witham in Essex, wrote in the *British Medical Journal* to desperately ask for professional advice.<sup>5</sup> Dr Gimson was currently puzzled by the case of a patient who after getting wet and catching a cold in 1842 or 1843 suffered from an ‘attack of sleep (which) lasted nine or ten months (...) in 1848, another attack lasted eighteen months, (and whose) present attack dates from May 1860.’<sup>6</sup> That meant three years at the time of the publication of the article which ended with a call for help from the profession: ‘I have simply related facts as far as I am able in the case of my patient (...) with the hope that someone may suggest a way of proceeding likely to be of use in the treatment of the disease, for disease it certainly is.’<sup>7</sup>

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psychology also including essays by George Combe, John Foster, Mme de Stael and John Mason (New York: Pearson, 1835; Hartford: Andrus & Son, 1841, 1842, 1844, 1845, 1847, 1849, 1850, 1851, 1854).

5 A.E. Durham, ‘The Physiology of Sleep’, *Guy’s Hospital Gazette* (3rd ser., 6, 1860), 149–73 and ‘The State of the Brain during Sleep’ *Guy’s Hospital Gazette* (3rd ser., 6, 1866), 149–73. W.G. Gimson, ‘Case of Prolonged and Profound Sleep, occurring at intervals during twenty years’, *British Medical Journal* (1, 1863), 616.

6 Gimson, ‘Case of Prolonged and Profound Sleep’, 616. [His emphasis].

7 Gimson, ‘Case of Prolonged and Profound Sleep’, 616.

The mysterious illness of Dr Gimson's patient, together with those of thousands of contemporaries, were fascinating case studies for medical men who had an interest in sleep theories.

These were diverse and widely disputed throughout the nineteenth century. In his historiography of sleep theories in the nineteenth century, Dr Antonio Culebras, a specialist of sleep disorders, lists four categories: vascular, chemical, neural and behavioural.<sup>8</sup>

Against the background of scientific speculation, sleeping disorders were listed and when possible observed and discussed. Sleeping and eating disorders were frequently connected, for excessive sleep is usually accompanied by insufficient nourishment. The physiological and psychological aspects of the conditions we would now term narcolepsy and anorexia had not been fully understood in the nineteenth century, and many considered prolonged sleeping and fasting as manifestations of divine miracles. Some patients who at a later date would have lived and died in hospital anonymity, were known, visited, given money, written and talked about.

*The Anatomy of Sleep* by Edward Binns is 'filled with many opinions and anecdotes about sleep, it also contain[s] some threads of knowledge about the physiology of sleep' according to Stanley Finger.<sup>9</sup> Binns's work has been called the 'capstone of the pre-scientific era'<sup>10</sup> of sleep research. In this book, the author strives to list every variety of sleep or, in the words of a reviewer, 'every variety of existence which is not waking'<sup>11</sup> including somnambulism, trance, mesmeric slumber, and its other phenomena, as well as ecstasy and catalepsy. Binns illustrates his definitions with examples drawn from the medical literature accessible to him, warning the reader that, out of the great number of cases recorded, he will select but a few, 'as

8 Antonio Culebras, *Sleep Disorders and Neurological Disease* (New York and Basel: Marcel Dekker Inc., 2005), 13–17.

9 Stanley Finger, *Origins of Neuroscience: A History of Explorations into Brain Functions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 244.

10 W.B. Webb, 'Sleep Research Past and Present' in W.B. Webb, ed., *Sleep: An Active Process* (Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman, 1973), 1–10.

11 'Dr Binns's Anatomy of Sleep', *The Spectator* (1 October 1842), 954–5.

they all present, with very trifling exceptions, very similar phenomena.<sup>12</sup> Eight cases of women or girls who experienced prolonged sleep are recorded, notably that of Margaret Lyall who 'fell asleep on the 27 of June, and continued sleeping until the 30 of that month, when she awoke. Then again she slept July 1–Aug 8'.<sup>13</sup>

When using this example Binns, who refers to Mary instead of Margaret Lyall, is quoting an earlier publication by Robert Macnish. Indeed, in a chapter about 'Protracted sleep', Macnish already marvelled at the unusual phenomenon:

I have already mentioned a few instances of individuals remaining for days or weeks in a state of profound sleep. The nature of this extraordinary affection is, in a great measure, unknown; it arises, in most cases, without any obvious cause, generally resists every method that can be adopted for removing it, and disappears of its own accord. The case of Mary Lyall [...] is one of the most remarkable instances of excessive somnolency on record.<sup>14</sup>

As we notice, Macnish had previously miscopied the name of the patient when quoting an article entitled 'Account of the remarkable Case of Margaret Lyall, who continued in a State of Sleep nearly Six Weeks' by Rev. James Brewster, Minister of Craig, in volume eight of the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, published in 1818. Reverend Brewster had reported the case of the twenty-one year old girl to his brother, Dr Brewster, in a letter dated 16 February 1816. The latter had then published the full particulars of the case two years later, pointing out that when Margaret awoke, she had no knowledge of what had happened and that successive fits of sleepiness occurred in a similar way.<sup>15</sup>

The one explanation Macnish could find to the condition was occasional overdose of laudanum: 'Excessively protracted sleep may ensue from

12 Edward Binns, *The Anatomy of Sleep; or, the art of procuring sound and refreshing slumber at will* (London: John Churchill, 1842), 62.

13 Binns, *The Anatomy of Sleep*, 61.

14 Macnish, *The Philosophy of Sleep*, 210–11.

15 *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, vol. 8 (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable & Co. and Francis Pillans, 1818), 249–57.

the injudicious use of narcotics', he writes. He is specific on this point and illustrates it with 'a very striking instance of this kind [which] occurred on 17 February 1816, near Lymington' when a child who 'had been painfully afflicted for some time previous', was given 'an anodyne (probably laudanum,) for the purpose of procuring it rest. The consequence was that it fell into a profound sleep, which continued for three weeks'.<sup>16</sup> Intent to compile as many cases of protracted or otherwise unordinary sleep as they could, Macnish and Binns skimmed medical records for precedents. Thus, both authors relate the 'curious case [...] of the Lady of Nismes', recorded in the *Memoirs of the Royal Academy of Sciences*, published in Berlin in 1777:

Her attacks of sleep took place periodically, at sunrise, and at noon. The first continued till within a short time of the succession of the second, and the second continued till within seven or eight in the evening, when she awoke and continued so until the next morning. Her sleep was remarkably profound, and during the very brief intervals of wakefulness, she hurriedly swallowed small quantities of broth [...]. When the somnolency had continued for six months, it left her suddenly for six months, and then attacked her again, leaving another interval of six months. When it had lasted a year, the interval between its approach and departure was one twelvemonth. At length the disease disappeared all together, and she lived to the age of eighty-one, and died at last of dropsy.<sup>17</sup>

As sleep research was progressing, authors quoted one another and capitalized on the others' findings, creating the impression that cases multiplied when in fact the same examples were continuously repeated and recycled. Thus, compiling John Elliotson's *Human Physiology*, a book originally published in 1815 as an annotated translation of the work by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach,<sup>18</sup> subsequently augmented through at least five editions, and Robert Macnish's *Philosophy of Sleep*, Binns goes on with his historiography of mysterious prolonged sleep:

16 Macnish, *The Philosophy of Sleep*, 213.

17 Binns, *The Anatomy of Sleep*, 63 and Macnish, *The Philosophy of Sleep*, 215.

18 Blumenbach (1752–1840), a professor at Gottingen, is considered the father or modern anthropology. He proposed that sleep was caused by the lack of blood in the brain. See Culebras, *Sleep Disorders and Neurological Disease*, 14.

Elizabeth Orvin, as related by Macnish and Dr Elliotson, passed three fourths of her time in sleep. A woman of Hainault, slept seventeen or eighteen hours a day, for fifteen years. Another woman slept forty days, Elizabeth Perkins, in 1788, fell into a deep sleep, from which nothing could rouse her; but at the end of eleven days she awoke spontaneously, and went about her business as usual. In a week after she fell asleep again, and remained so for many days, dozing on, with occasional intervals of waking, for several months, when she died. Dr Elliotson mentions that he knew a young lady who slept for six weeks and recovered, and a twin sister who slept for a month.<sup>19</sup>

At the end of his own enumeration, to which Binns owed much, Macnish pauses to explain: 'There are a good many varieties in the phenomena of protracted sleep. In some cases, the individual remains for many days without eating or drinking; in others, the necessity for these natural wants arouse him for a short time from his slumber.'<sup>20</sup>

As the pronoun used by Macnish suggests, the phenomenon was not exclusively feminine, for all authors write that sufferers of the lethargic condition could be male as well as female. But in the case of female patients, the attack was always abrupt and unexplained, and the recovery equally sudden and most of the time complete, leaving the patient unharmed, fresh and totally unaware of what had happened to her.

In tune with the classification mania of the nineteenth century, sleep researchers classified pathological sleeping patterns in various categories. Thus, deep, extended sleep should be confounded neither with drowsiness, nor with trance. The American Dr Hammond in his volume on sleep and its derangements devoted several pages to indicate the difference between sleep and stupor or a 'comatose state'.<sup>21</sup> Edward Binns equally explained that in sleep or drowsiness the patient is visibly alive while in trance the appearance is that of a corpse:

19 Binns, *The Anatomy of Sleep*, 61–4 and Macnish, *The Philosophy of Sleep*, 212.

20 Macnish, *The Philosophy of Sleep*, 215.

21 William Alexander Hammond, *Sleep and its Derangements* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1869) 23–5.

TRANCE may be considered the next step from these cases which we have been considering [...]. It is one of the most singular affections to which the body is subject. During its continuance, the whole frame is cold, rigid, and inflexible, the countenance without color, the eye fixed and motionless, while breathing, and the pulsations of the heart, are, to all appearance, at an end. The mental powers, also, are generally superseded, and participate in the universal torpor which pervades the frame. In this extraordinary condition the person may remain for many days, having all, or nearly all, the characteristics of death impressed upon him.<sup>22</sup>

As an illustration of the science and culture interaction, it is interesting to observe how the fear of premature burial both fed and was fed by Gothic literature. The subsequent taphephobia made doctors and patients very suspicious of protracted sleep that looked like death.

The spooky stories of people in a state of trance buried alive were sensationalistic in the Romantic age and remained so until the age of advanced medical technology. Robert Macnish's introductory sentence in *Philosophy of Sleep* hammered it into its tens of thousands of readers' minds that 'Sleep is the intermediate state between wakefulness and death'. The greatest precaution was thus necessary to ascertain the clinical death of the patient before proceeding with the funeral. These frightening thoughts culminated in 1896 with William Tebb's co-founding of the London Association for the Prevention of Premature Burial and the publication of his *Premature Burial, and How It May Be Prevented, with Special Reference to Trance, Catalepsy, and Other Forms of Suspended Animation*, which was sufficiently popular to go through a second edition in 1905.<sup>23</sup> Tellingly, this would-be scientific volume, which received some medical authority from its co-author, Colonel Vollum, a doctor in the US army, opened on a quote from Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*, 'We have put her living in the Tomb!'

Sleep and death were frequently associated, possibly because of their mythical kinship, and stories such as the fictional Madeline Usher's or the real-life Lady Russell's 'who only escaped premature interment, by the

22 Binns, *The Anatomy of Sleep*, 72–3.

23 William Tebb and Edward Perry Vollum, *Premature Burial, and How it May be Prevented, with Special Reference to Trance, Catalepsy, and Other Forms of Suspended Animation* (London: S. Sonnenschein & Co., 1905).

affectionate prudence of her husband'<sup>24</sup> generated taphephobic anxieties passed down from generation to generation. In 1865, Alfred Taylor corroborated as much in his *Principles and Practice of Medical Jurisprudence*:

There are some forms of disease affecting the nervous systems, as, for example [...] catalepsy, the systems of which are occasionally such, as closely to simulate death. Respiration and circulation appear either to cease entirely, or to be carried on so feebly, that, to uninformed observers, the person affected may seem to be really dead. Catalepsy, or, as it is vulgarly called, trance, in which the person lies in an unconscious state, may thus assume the appearance of death.<sup>25</sup>

The permeability between literature and science is also observable in the case of Harriet Martineau who included a special clause in her will that her head should be severed before burial. She changed her mind later on and was buried with her head attached to her body, but the fact that she contemplated decapitation proves the intensity of her phobia as well as the popularity of the sleep-mistaken-for-death trope, even though Martineau's death in 1876 preceded by almost twenty years Tebb's spine-chilling estimate, that '[t]wo thousand seven hundred persons at least, in England and Wales, are yearly consigned to a living death, the most horrible conceivable'.<sup>26</sup>

Apart from Gothic fiction, other forms of literature also permeated the medical discourse. Across the Atlantic, Blanchard Fosgate, who abundantly quoted Binns, added other cases that read almost like fairy tales. For instance, he relates

the case of a poor girl, eight years old, who, being beaten by a severe step-mother, and sent hungry with some refreshments to her father in the fields, could not refrain from eating part of them. Reflecting afterwards on the probable consequences of her conduct, she proceeded no further on her way, but retired to a neighbouring wood, and there fell into a profound sleep, being oppressed with fear and sorrow: in this

24 Binns, *The Anatomy of Sleep*, 73.

25 Alfred Swaine Taylor, *The Principles and Practice of Medical Jurisprudence*, 2 vols. [1865] (London: J & A Churchill, 1894), vol. 1, 43.

26 Tebb, William and Edward Vollum, *Premature Burial and How It May Be Prevented: With Special Reference to Trance, Catalepsy, and Other Forms of Suspended Animation* (London: S. Sonnenschein, 1896), 263.

state she remained for seven days, and when discovered, showed no symptoms of life, besides the softness of her flesh and the flexibility of her joints. Dan. Ludovicus, from whom Dr Plot borrows this relation, happening to be present, succeeded in his attempts to recover this poor creature.<sup>27</sup>

This narration incorporates plot elements that point to the Snow White paradigm: the severe step-mother, the girl's walk into the woods, her eating some forbidden food, her subsequent deep sleep and casts the medical man 'Dan. Ludovicus' as Prince Charming recovering the 'poor creature' from lifelessness. Daniel Ludwig or Ludovici was a seventeenth-century German physician whose publications in Latin were famous throughout Europe.

Fairy tales and mythology were so ingrained in popular culture that the previously quoted case of the 'Lady of Nismes' whose sleep 'continued for six months, [...] left her suddenly for six months, and then attacked her again, leaving another interval of six months' reads like an incarnation of the mythological character of Persephone.

From travel literature, cases were transplanted into medical literature. From Africa, cases were reported, as for instance the illness of the granddaughter of Queen Maumee in Liberia, first narrated by Horatio Bridge in his *Journal of an African Cruiser*, which was repeated so many times that it deserves to be quoted in full.

This poor, doomed girl had been suffering – no, not suffering, for, except when forcibly aroused, there appears to be no uneasiness – but she had been lingering two months in a disease peculiar to Africa. It is called the 'sleepy disease', and is considered incurable. The persons attacked by it are those who take little exercise, and live principally on vegetables, particularly cassady and rice. Some ascribe it altogether to the cassady, which is supposed to be strongly narcotic. Not improbably, the climate has much influence, the disease being most prevalent in low and marshy situations. Irresistible drowsiness continually weighs down the patient, who can be kept awake only for the few moments needful to take a little food. When this lethargy has lasted three or four months, death comes – with a tread that the patient cannot hear, and makes the slumber but a little more sound.

27 Blanchard Fosgate, *Sleep Psychologically Considered with Reference to Sensation and Memory* (New York: George Putnam, 1850), 54.



I found the aspect of Maumee's beautiful grand-daughter inconceivably affecting. It was strange to behold her so quietly involved in sleep – from which it might be supposed she would awake so full of youthful life – and yet to know that this was no refreshing slumber, but a spell in which she was fading away from the eyes that loved her. Whatever might chance, be it grief or joy, the effect would be the same. Whoever should shake her by the arm – whether the accents of a friend fell feebly on her ear, or those of strangers, like ourselves, the only response would be that troubled cry, as of a spirit that hovered on the confines of both worlds, and could have sympathy with neither. And yet, withal, it seemed so easy to cry to her – 'Awake! Enjoy your life! Cast off this noon-tide slumber!' But only the peal of the last trumpet will summon her out of that mysterious sleep.<sup>28</sup>

By introducing the main, though unnamed, character as a princess under a spell, Horatio Bridge's narration reads like an Africanized version of the familiar fairy tale 'Sleeping Beauty'. The African 'Sleep of disease and death' was balanced with other exotic examples, such as the cases of Indian fakirs first told by Braid and retold by his followers. In his 1850 book *Observations of Trance*, Braid gave the account of an Indian fakir who was buried alive in the presence of Sir Claude Wade, the English governor at the time. After several months the fakir was exhumed and restored to consciousness and health. The extraordinary power of concentration possessed by the yogi and fakirs gave them the power, it was thought, to throw themselves into extended cataleptic sleeps.

No matter how immensely influential throughout most of the nineteenth century Macnish, Braid, and Binns were, the cases they recorded were most of the time recovered from older and sometimes foreign publications, striving to create, as it were, a genealogy of sleeping oddities.

Medical interest in the causes of sleep and various genres of literature concerned with sleep and trance seem to have anticipated the most sensational cases of prolonged sleep observed in Victorian Britain. These

28 Horatio Bridge, *Journal of an African Cruiser* (London: Wiley & Putnam, 1845), 101–2. Bridge's narration was reproduced in 'Journal of an African Cruiser', *Athenaeum*, 13 September 1845, 899–900; 'The Sleep of Disease and Death', *Mirror of Literature, Amusement and Instruction*, 20 September 1845, 184–5; 'Journal of an African Cruiser', *Literary Gazette and Journal of the Belles Lettres*, 16 August 1845, 542; Hammond, *Sleep and its Derangements*, 290–2.

included Elizabeth Squirrell, a teenager who suffered from cataleptic fits, slept much, ate almost nothing for twenty-five weeks and eventually recovered. Her autobiography recorded by one of her watchers and published in 1853 furnished the details of her mysterious malady. 'For one month of the time,' confided the patient 'I lay in a kind of cataleptic fit, as rigid as if I were a corpse, and unable even to have my head turned upon the pillow' before she related her equally mysterious recovery thanks to magnetism and homeopathic medicine.<sup>29</sup>

To treat Elizabeth's mysterious pathology, some Victorian doctors suggested mesmerism or the use of 'animal magnetism', or hypnotherapy. James Braid, for instance, explained how he had cured cases of muscular and sensorial paralysis, which actually looked like prolonged sleep, through hypnotism. Hypnotism, it was believed, gave the hypnotist the power to control the patient's brain to perform actions thought impossible under normal waking conditions. Stage performers throwing their lady assistants into pseudo-cataleptic plank feats by using hypnotism seemed to ascertain this fact. Thus, medical and non-medical literature as well as popular culture had prepared the public to expect and witness real-life cases of mysterious sleep. Elizabeth Squirell's case attracted considerable attention from the press and the medical profession. An impatiently hostile Charles Dickens reported in the monthly literary supplement to his *Household Words* that 'the excitement among the people of Suffolk has been very great', as 'medical men, clergymen, Dissenting ministers, carriage aristocracy, gig, cart, and foot folk, alike shared in the intense desire to gaze on this extraordinary child' whom he suspected of fraud.<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth's was followed by the even stranger case of Ellen Sadler, the girl who slept for nine years without waking up from 1871 till 1880, and was variously nicknamed 'The Sleeping Beauty' or 'The Sleeping Maid'. The house of her parents in Turville, 'The Sleepy

29 *Autobiography of Elizabeth Squirrell, of Shottisham, Suffolk by One of her Watchers* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1853) quoted in William Martin Wilkinson, *The Cases of the Welsh Fasting Girl and Her Father. On the Possibility of Long-Continued Abstinence from Food* (London: J. Burns, 1870), 39.

30 Charles Dickens, 'Law and Crime', *The Household Narrative of Current Events*, September 1852, 200.

Cottage', became an attraction for physicians, journalists, sensation seekers and even, it was rumoured, members of the Royal family (see Figure 1.)



Figure 1: Ellen Sadler's 'Sleepy Cottage', photograph: Victoria Laurent.

Ellen Sadler's mysterious sleep came as the apex of the sleep-craze of the late nineteenth century. According to Edward Binns's definitions, it seems that the strange case of Ellen Sadler fell in the prolonged sleep, rather than in the trance category. This, however, was not the opinion of the reporter for the medical journal *The Lancet*, who entitled his paper of 8 March 1873 'The Turville Trance Case'.<sup>31</sup> Ellen had been asleep for three years, when the article was published and 'ha[d] excited a good deal of local interest and curiosity, and ha[d] naturally had numbers of people to visit her'.<sup>32</sup> The reporter went on to inform the readers that 'It was in 1870, Mr Hayman states, that he first professionally visited the child at

31 Anon., 'Medical Annotations: The Turville Trance Case', *The Lancet* (8 March, 1873), 352-3.

32 'Medical Annotations: The Turville Trance Case', 352.

Turville, named Ellen Sadler, who was sent to hospital but discharged after four months as incurable. *The Lancet* journalist then describes the present state of the little patient: the child had, since returning home, been 'lying on the left side, with her hand under her head, and the lower extremities drawn upwards'.<sup>33</sup> The composition of the picture the reader visualizes when reading this description is, with the exception of the hand, similar to that of Edward Burne-Jones's sleeping princess in the 1871 watercolor and his oil on canvas of 1874.<sup>34</sup> While it is impossible to ascertain that the artist had visited Ellen, or even heard about her, it is interesting to notice the concomitance of his interest in the subject and its depiction and the existence of the 'Sleeping Girl of Turville'.

Another journalist, the editor of the *Wycombe Telegraph*, in company with a medical man visited the cottage in 1874 and interviewed the mother of the sleeping girl. He reported the results of his visits as follows:

Sure enough there lay a girl on the bed, apparently sixteen years of age, and sound asleep. The breathing appeared perfectly natural, and the whole features and form were in a state of complete repose. Many medical men from England, Scotland, Ireland, and also from America, have visited the cottage – have studied the case minutely – have sent experienced nurses to watch, and all have come away baffled, and not convinced one way or the other.<sup>35</sup>

In the scepticism of the medical profession, we can see the influence of Macnish, who in the *Philosophy of Sleep* had been warning observers since 1830 against hoaxes. When protracted sleep did not occur in conjunction with abstinence from food and drink, 'somnolence is sometimes feigned

33 'Medical Annotations: The Turville Trance Case', 352–3.

34 Edward Burne-Jones, *The Sleeping Beauty* (1871), watercolor, Manchester Art Gallery and *The Sleeping Beauty* (1874), oil on canvas, Dublin, Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art.

35 Anon., 'The Sleeping Girl of Turville', *Wycombe Telegraph*, reprinted in *The Royal Cornwall Gazette, Falmouth Packet and General Advertiser* (13 February, 1875), 2 and in *The Mercury* (4 May 1875), 3.

by impostors for the purpose of extorting charity'.<sup>36</sup> However, to ward off medical suspicion, Ellen's mother agreed to have her child tested:

The mother is by no means averse to any fair test being applied in order to ascertain whether her daughter is in a trance or not [...] she has allowed the use of galvanism – (without knowing what was being done) – but no visible effect has resulted from anything which has yet been tried. [...] The countenance is pale, but it is not the paleness of death. [...] Now all the symptoms are supposed to have settled down, and point to a permanent trance only to be relieved by death.<sup>37</sup>

Maybe it was the same fairy tale which had inspired Burne-Jones which prompted the sleeper to prove the journalists' predictions wrong: Ellen slept on for another six years, when she miraculously woke up in 1880, married, bore at least five children and lived to a ripe old age. The spontaneous awakening was taken for granted by some doctors, especially as Ellen had been continuously fed during her nine-year sleep. 'There has never been any desire to represent it as a "fasting case", or anything of the miracle type. The child has been fed with wine, gruel, and other things [...] many times a day in very small quantities by means of the spout of a toy teapot inserted between two broken teeth', explained one observer.<sup>38</sup> Her long sleep was made understandable thanks to Macnish's theory of 'human hybernation'. According to the Scottish physician, 'The power possessed by the body of subsisting such a length of time in protracted sleep, is most remarkable, and bears some analogy to the abstinence of the Polar bear in the winter season'.<sup>39</sup> The spontaneous awakening was further substantiated by Dr Marie de Manacéine, who equated narcolepsy with momentary amnesia: 'Sensibility in all its forms is usually weakened during such sleep' wrote the Russian lady. 'The subjects almost never dream, and on awaking cannot recall any sensations experienced during sleep; consciousness was interrupted at the moment they fell asleep, and they cannot understand

36 Macnish, *The Philosophy of Sleep*, 215.

37 Anon., 'The Sleeping Girl of Turville' 3.

38 'Medical Annotations: The Turville Trance Case', 353.

39 Macnish, *The Philosophy of Sleep*, 215.

that they have slept for weeks or months.<sup>40</sup> Myth seemed to be turned into medical evidence under the pen of Dr Marie de Manacéïne.

However, the overlapping of myth and medicine was not to everybody's liking. And indeed, real-life sleeping beds became the battlegrounds where sleep researchers of various convictions wedged their theoretical battles. When *The Lancet* reporter referred to 'fasting cases of the miraculous type', he was perhaps alluding to Ann Moore<sup>41</sup> (1761–1813), who allegedly survived without food for more than five years. Her case had been related by Edward Binns, together with several extraordinary examples of very long sleep occurring in conjunction with extended periods of fasting. Ann Moore of Tutbury 'fasted for thirteen days consecutively, but [...] did not remain awake, but for a few hours at a time'.<sup>42</sup> The journalist was certainly alluding also to Sarah Jacobs (1857–69), who was believed to live through God's will only, without the necessity of terrestrial food, was taken to hospital with the consent of her parents to prove the miracle, and died after a few days, as nurses had been forbidden to give her any nourishment. These two cases attracted a good deal of attention, and fostered heated debates between mystical believers in *anorexia mirabilis* and the scientific partisans who suspected a hoax before the condition was described by Dr Gull as *anorexia nervosa* in 1874.

The case of Sarah Jacobs became a *cause célèbre* as two medical opinions collided. While the self-styled partisans of the 'exact science' believed that no human body could survive more than a week without nourishment, the supporters of alternative medicine believed this was possible under certain

40 Marie de Manacéïne, *Sleep: its Physiology, Pathology, Hygiene and Psychology* (London: Walter Scott, 1897), 98.

41 Anon. (A Gentleman living near Tutbury), *An account of the extraordinary abstinence of Ann Moor, of Tutbury, Staffordshire, who has, since June 1807, lived entirely without food; giving the particulars of her life to the present time, an account of the investigation instituted on the occasion, and observations on the letters of some medical men who attended it. Also other similar cases of abstinence* (Utttoxeter: R. Richards, 3rd edn, 1810) and Richmond Legh, *A statement of facts, relative to the supposed abstinence of Ann Moore, of Tutbury, Staffordshire* (Burton-on-Trent: Croft, 1813).

42 Binns, *The Anatomy of Sleep*, 3.

conditions and went to great length to find examples from medical archives, from cases of Indian fakirs, and from comparisons with animal hibernation. This similarity was frequently underlined, in Britain as well as abroad. The American Dr Hammond, for example, suggested that '[The] cases of protracted sleep present many analogies with the condition of hibernation which certain of the lower animals enter into at stated periods. Doubtless the state of the brain is the same, and is one of anaemia.'<sup>43</sup> These cases must have been fewer on the other side of the Atlantic than they were in Europe, for Dr Hammond writes with some disappointment that 'it has never been [his] fortune to witness a case of protracted sleep.'<sup>44</sup> Dr Garth Wilkinson took a passionate interest in Sarah Jacobs's case and his younger brother, the solicitor William Martin Wilkinson, also gathered press clippings of almost similar cases.

Dr Garth Wilkinson was staunchly convinced that magnetism was more essential to life than food was, and after the death of Sarah Jacobs and the subsequent trial and condemnation of her father for manslaughter, Wilkinson and his brother published a vindictive seventy-page booklet to explain why, in their opinion, the slaughterers had been the medical profession, in the shape of the four nurses sent to watch that Sarah was taking no food or drink. Dr Garth Wilkinson's letter dated 1 February 1870 and reproduced as an appendix to his brother's plea states that he had for a long time cultivated a keen interest in cases of fasting and prolonged sleep, and that these extraordinary occurrences tended to prove the shortcomings of the traditional medical practice: 'From the first I took a deep interest in the case of the Welsh Fasting Girl, and saw the great issues which it involves' wrote Dr Wilkinson, according to whom '[m]edical evidence in the case is as idle as the winds. It is as irrelevant as the most common opinion; it is indeed but common opinion dressed with authority'. Having named and dismissed his enemies, the doctor discloses the 'great issues' as 'the clique spirit', 'love of dominion'. The modern science-men, it seemed to Wilkinson, refused to be faced with the complex mysteries of human

43 Hammond, *Sleep and its Derangements*, 303.

44 Hammond, *Sleep and its Derangements*, 303.

biology and twisted reality to make it fit their simplistic predetermined medical dogmas. ‘The layman who asks the first medical acquaintance he meets, gets for answer, “Any medical man can tell you that human life cannot be supported without food for more than eight days”. Sarah Jacobs, you see, dies punctually.’<sup>45</sup>

Sarah’s apparent lifelessness to the Wilkinsons did not mean that she was dying, but rather that she lived a different – if invisible, inner life:

I therefore plead to the broad democracy of knowledge, that medical opinion, and most especially scientific medical opinion, is valueless, and should be purged out of court, on this man’s (Sarah’s father’s) trial. [...] The Press has played an ignoble part in this affair, and has applauded to the echo of the eight-day life axiom of the doctors. Popes of vulgar opinion living on doctors’ pence! [...] To me, who see no impossibility in the maintenance of human life under unusual conditions for an indefinite period without ponderable food, the man’s own allegation and tale before the coroner seems plain and straightforward; and there are few parts of it that I have not attested over and over again in my own practice and experience. [...] If an emotion can strike the bodily functions into apparent death, and the spiritual part be present and manifest with an unwonted life, you have here both the conditions for a very lasting stand in nature: you have a minimum of waste, and a fountain of vitality, regnant in the body at the same time. Such is the trance state.<sup>46</sup>

Then, Dr Garth Wilkinson empathizes with the patient and asserts that if he had been in the place of Sarah Jacobs, he too would have died, but for reasons different than the diagnosed starvation. He would have died because of the materialistic harshness of the nurses, whom he calls the Four Death-Watches from Guy’s. Pretending to be in court, he then concludes with considerable rhetoric:

[G]entlemen of the jury, you have a frailest girl, living on the very border, on the lid and skin of the precipice of this life, whom a puff of air, or of feeling, threw into convulsion; and her state had been maintained for aught that yet appears, on no mortal

45 J.J.G. Wilkinson in Wilkinson, *The Cases of the Welsh Fasting Girl and Her Father*, 63–6.

46 J.J.G. Wilkinson in Wilkinson, *The Cases of the Welsh Fasting Girl and Her Father*, 63–6.



sustenance, but on spiritual incomings; on imponderable and atmospheric saturations, and on the love and the sympathy of her father and her mother and her home.<sup>47</sup>

The fabric that had kept the girl alive, contended the famous Mesmerist, was

all built up of influx from within, of cement from the kindly air, and of the magnetism of charity and affection. [...] Now the Four Death-Watches, unhappily sanctioned by the parents, with the first chairs they took around her, abolished every condition of her continuance, and broke the slender thread of states on which her life was hung. Their unmagnetic batteries of frames stopped the currents of her spirit, therewith twisted her organization from its own feeding [...] and walled her away in their dire *oubliette* from the sacred sustenance of a father's and a mother's love; stamped out her angels, her parents, and her breath, in one [...]. [T]he Four Death-Watches from Guy's were four conclusive executioners.<sup>48</sup>

Desperately trying to overturn 'exact science', Wilkinson pleaded for a more holistic consideration of the human being, who should not be considered as a breathing automaton but as a living component in a larger compound of visible and invisible forces, some magnetic, some affective, some spiritual. Dr Garth Wilkinson took advantage of his letter in the defence of Sarah Jacob's father, to discredit his adversaries. 'Do not trust "exact science"' he wrote, because to him, scientific exactness always came at the cost of harsh simplifications, at the maiming of organic reality. Only by forcing facts to fit in pre-established doctrines could medical exactitude be achieved, whereas to him the principle of life was diversity and unpredictability. Wilkinson rounded up his plea by naming the 'Three False Witnesses' who, according to him, had assisted the Four Death-Watches in killing Sarah. These were '1, "Medical Opinion", in which there is nothing medical; 2, "Exact Science", whose exactitude does not reach the case; and 3, "Laws of Nature" made by coroners out of material furnished by Death-Watches'.<sup>49</sup>

47 J.J.G. Wilkinson in Wilkinson, *The Cases of the Welsh Fasting Girl and Her Father*, 66.

48 J.J.G. Wilkinson in Wilkinson, *The Cases of the Welsh Fasting Girl and Her Father*, 66.

49 J.J.G. Wilkinson in Wilkinson, *The Cases of the Welsh Fasting Girl and Her Father*, 70.

Dr William Howitt absolutely agreed and provided additional examples of extensive fasting. In *Human Nature*, June 1, 1869, was related the 'case of a girl at Belfast, who took no food for five years.' After an emotional shock, she became demented and 'slept much, and ultimately could not be aroused at all, and in that unconscious state she lay for five years, taking no food'.<sup>50</sup>

The case of Sarah Jacobs was not isolated, and Wilkinson's book relates the case of Mary Kettle, substantiated with newspaper clippings. The *Newcastle Chronicle* dated 29 March 1869 reported it in an article titled 'Extraordinary Case of Illness and Trance':

A remarkable case of suspended animation has occurred at Millom, in the neighbourhood of Whitehaven, in West Cumberland. It appears that some 18 or 19 weeks ago, a girl, about 11 or 12 years of age [...] was ill. [...] She was attended to with every care, but made no progress towards recovery, and in a short time fell into a lethargic state, resembling that of a person in a trance. In this condition she remained for many weeks, but at length woke up to a state of consciousness.<sup>51</sup>

The reason why the cases of female patients were more sensational and more widely popularized than those of male patients may come from the association of ideas that point to the fairy tale of the Sleeping Beauty. In the same way as the image of the drowned evokes a cohort of floating Ophelias and fallen women in Victorian art despite the statistic fact that men died by drowning more frequently than women did, the victim of narcolepsy conjures up the image of the Sleeping Princess in the 'Briar Rose' tale, even though in reality the disease affected men and women alike.

Another reason for the gendering of hypersomnia may come from a theory which associated weakness, under-developed mental capacities and narcolepsy. The less exercised the brain, the more easily it could become exhausted and cause a loss of blood irrigation which then led to drowsiness.

The vascular theories of sleep were the most popular ones in Britain in the early part of the nineteenth century, as they were supported on the

50 William Howitt in Wilkinson, *The Cases of the Welsh Fasting Girl and Her Father*, 50.

51 Wilkinson, *The Cases of the Welsh Fasting Girl and Her Father*, 37.

one hand by Robert Macnish, who exposed his theory that sleep is caused by congestion of the brain in 1830, and on the other hand by the proponents of the alternative theory of anemia, the American William Alexander Hammond and his British counterpart, Arthur Edward Durham. While most British scientists were disputing whether sleep was induced by the pressure of blood, or the deficit of it in the brain, alternative theories stressed the importance of 'magnetism'. This theory was closer to the neural theories that were being suggested in Italy, Germany, France and Spain by the partisans of the emergent neurosciences.

The widely spread anemia theory was endorsed by Marie de Manacéïne, and the already mentioned pioneer of sleep research, who did not reject other possible causes, especially neural, psychological and behavioural. Her works published in the 1890s became popular internationally as they were translated into French, English and German. In her volume entitled *Sleep: its Physiology, Pathology, Hygiene and Psychology* (1897), Marie de Manacéïne explained that

narcolepsy usually consists of an irresistible tendency to sleep, sometimes developing in consequence of a considerable loss of blood, of a painful emotion, of excessive fatigue, etc.; [...] An abnormal sleep of this kind may last for several days, weeks, or even months without intermission. It is for the most part impossible to awaken such subjects, and even if awakened they fall asleep again.<sup>52</sup>

The causes stated as conducive to narcolepsy suggest a distinct gendering of the condition, for women in the nineteenth century were thought to be more liable to emotions and fatigue than men, and their menstrual blood loss was an accepted origin for various derangements. An under-developed intellectual capacity was also a dangerous pre-condition for protracted sleep:

[P]ersons with feebly developed consciousness sleep much, because a feeble consciousness is easily and quickly fatigued. This is the case with children, savages, cretins, and

52 Marie de Manacéïne, *Sleep*, 97.

people of inferior intelligence, who sleep much and fall asleep as soon as they have no occupation.<sup>53</sup>

To her list of people with ‘feebly developed consciousness’, the author would have been ill-advised to add women, which would have included her own person. However, it is hardly doubtful that to a nineteenth-century readership, the list directly included the ‘fair sex’. Indeed, across Europe scientists had been defining the scale of evolution, placing women somewhere between children and savages. In his best-selling *Descent of Man*, Charles Darwin pointed out at the ‘natural’ difference in intelligence between men and women. ‘The higher powers of the imagination and reason’ as well as patience and perseverance, he asserted,

will have been developed in man, partly through sexual selection, – that is, through the contest of rival males, and partly through natural selection, – that is, from success in the general struggle for life; and as in both cases the struggle will have been during maturity, the characters thus gained will have been transmitted more fully to the male than to the female offspring. Thus man has ultimately become superior to woman.<sup>54</sup>

In order to give a hint to how inferior the average woman was to her male counterpart, Darwin noted in his concluding remarks that, in most cases ‘the female resembles her young offspring throughout life’.<sup>55</sup> Keeping Darwin’s conclusions in mind, Marie de Manacéïne’s observations on narcolepsy suggest a distinctive gendering of the malady, further underlined by its correlation with other feminine supposed deficiencies, caused by menstruation and emotional fragility.

Braid, Macnish, Binns and Wilkinson belonged to a generation of ‘gentlemen scientists’ whose interests encompassed literature, natural history and metaphysics as well as medicine. In their semi-medical literature, all four authors documented real-life cases of prolonged sleep. In a way, they set a tradition and described a pattern of hypersomnia that possibly contributed to raise their contemporaries’ expectations to observe similar

53 Marie de Manacéïne, *Sleep*, 90.

54 Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (London: John Murray, 1871), vol. 2, 328.

55 Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, vol. 2, 397.

occurrences. They could unknowingly have started a fashion for sleeping women.

Were then Elizabeth Siddal, Elizabeth Barrett-Browning, Ada Lovelace, Harriet Martineau, Florence Nightingale and hundreds of lesser known invalids who spent much of their lives reclining in a somnolent state unconsciously inspired by unexplained cases related in medical journals? Or conversely, did they shape the path of science and the arts? Or were they under the spell of the mythical figure of Sleeping Beauty who, from the anonymous *Perceforest* in the mid-fourteenth century, and Giambattista Basile's tale in the sixteenth century, had descended to Perrault's pen in 1697 and that of the Grimm brothers in 1812, and from the latter to his English translator, Edgar Taylor? Taylor's translation and adaptation was illustrated by George Cruikshank. It was successful enough to go through two editions, in 1823 and 1856, and helped to catapult the tales in the public imagination.<sup>56</sup>

'The Briar Rose' fairy tale enjoyed an unprecedented popularity in the nineteenth century, inspiring painters such as Edward Burne-Jones; *tableaux vivants* that became so popular that they were performed throughout the country, from Queen Victoria's reception rooms at Osborne House<sup>57</sup> to the nurseries of the middle-class;<sup>58</sup> illustrators as famous as Walter Crane, who produced delightful etchings to accompany his sister Lucy's translation of the Grimms' fairy tale; and composers, among them Tchaikovsky, whose ballet was staged for the first time in 1890. The legend, it seems, impacted on the artistic productions of the Victorians as well as on their biological and mental conditions. This was all the more tempting as narcolepsy

56 Jennifer Schacker, *National Dreams: The Remaking of Fairy Tales in Nineteenth-Century England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

57 A photograph of a *tableau vivant* titled 'Sleeping Beauty', 'showing the Prince, Mr Fritz Ponsonby, approaching Miss Heseltine who is playing Beauty, reclining on a mound wearing a gala of flowers' dated 31 December 1894 has recently surfaced from the collection of Lady Patricia Ramsay and been auctioned.

58 On 5 April 1873 the magazine *The Graphic* published an engraving showing how to stage the *tableau vivant* 'Sleeping Beauty' in the nursery. *The Graphic* (1 April, 1873), 321.

could be treated by hypnotherapy. Thus, Sleeping Beauties could rest their dreamless sleep in the blissful certainty that some Doctor Charming would come and wake them up, unharmed and perfectly refreshed.

The sleeping-craze of the nineteenth century needs to be considered as the result of the interpenetration of visualities, fiction, scientific and non-scientific assumptions, and as such, it provides the historian with valuable cultural clues to the Victorian psyche.

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## The 'ghastly waxwork at the fair': Charles Dickens's Sleeping Beauty in *Great Expectations*<sup>1</sup>

– All moveables, of wonder from all parts,  
Are here, Albinos, painted Indians, Dwarfs,  
The Horse of knowledge and the Learned Pig,  
The Stone-eater, the man that swallows fire,  
Giants, Ventriloquists, the Invisible Girl,  
The Bust that speaks and moves its goggling eyes,  
The Wax-work, Clock-work, all the marvellous craft  
Of modern Merlins, Wild Beasts, Puppet shows  
All out-o'-the-way, far-fetched, perverted things,  
All freaks of Nature, all Promethean thoughts,  
All jumbled up together to make up  
This Parliament of Monsters. Tents and Booths  
Meanwhile, as if the whole were one vast Mill,  
Are vomiting, receiving, on all sides,  
Men, Women, three-years' Children, Babes in arms.

— WILLIAM WORDSWORTH,  
'Residence in London', *The Prelude*, 1805

In Charles Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840–1), little Nell, a character who embodies the feminine ideal, is presented in the following terms: 'so small, so compact, so beautifully modelled, so fair, with such blue veins and

1 A shorter version of this article has been published as 'Wax, Death and Crime in Dickens's *Great Expectations*', *The Messenger* 22.1 (Summer 2013), 32–7.

such transparent skin, and such little feet'.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, little Nell is sometimes believed to be 'a cunning device in wax' and taken for 'an important item of the curiosities' (179) that Mrs Jarley's waxworks exhibition offers. The novel, written at the time when Bartholomew Fair was threatened with closure,<sup>3</sup> is punctuated by hints at the type of waxwork exhibitions which could be seen in fairs, such as Ewing's, Ferguson's, Hoho's, Smithfield's and Godwin and Reynolds's. Waxes were, indeed, among the chief attractions available in fairs in the 1830s, the lying in state of George IV, for instance, appearing in many wax exhibitions of the period.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Dickens's Mrs Jarley looks like many women wax modellers who ran wax exhibitions at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century (such as Mrs Mills, Mrs Goldsmith, Mrs Sylvester, Mrs Patience Wright, Mrs Salmon, Mrs Clark<sup>5</sup> or Mrs Bullock),<sup>6</sup> and who proposed characters ranging from models of royals, natural wonders, like O'Brien, the famous Irish giant, celebrated criminals, like Thornton, tried for the murder of Mary Ashford, and even stock characters, such as Othello. The models, like Jarley's, merged the glamorous and the sensational or displayed the normal and the pathological, as exemplified by the twin infants united at

2 Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop* [1840–1] (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1995), 64. All further references to this edition will be given in the text.

3 As Thomas Frost relates in *The Old Showmen and the Old London Fairs* (1875), the world of the fair was a carnivalesque realm that civic authorities attempted to control – or even to put an end to. In 1840 the entire suppression of the fair was proposed; Bartholomew Fair was eventually limited to three days, theatrical booths forbidden and restricted to just a few stalls in 1849; John Timbs, *Curiosities of London* (London: David Bogue, 1855), 31.

4 The type of other attractions found in fairs in 1830 were menageries, the 'living skeleton', the pig-faced lady and the Scotch giant. Thomas Frost, *The Old Showmen and the Old London Fairs*, 2nd edn (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1875), 305.

5 Mrs Salmon (1650–1740) exhibited at Bartholomew and Southwark fairs before she settled in Fleet Street; Mrs Clark took over Mrs Salmon's show when she died. Dickens refers to Mrs Clark in *David Copperfield* (1850).

6 Pamela Pilbeam, *Madame Tussaud and the History of Waxworks* (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2003), 11–13.

the breast that appeared in the 1820s and 1830s.<sup>7</sup> Mrs Jarley's collection as a whole, therefore, pays homage to the world of the fair and its wax exhibits: criminals are exhibited alongside models of royals, while tall men are contrasted with short and thin ones. In addition, giants and dwarfs surround Jarley's caravan and Nell even associates Quilp, 'an uglier dwarf than could be seen anywhere for a penny' (64), with the waxworks, believing that he 'was wax-work himself' (177).<sup>8</sup>

However, Dickens's Mrs Jarley may also have been inspired by an even more popular wax modeller: Madame Tussaud. For like Madame Tussaud, who moved away from the world of the fair and settled in Baker Street in 1835, Jarley dreams of appealing to a middle-class and respectable audience. As a matter of fact, in the nineteenth century, waxworks more and more appealed to the bourgeoisie: they suited the tastes of the rising middle classes who went to see waxwork exhibitions as they would leaf through a fashion magazine. Because waxworks increasingly exploited costumes and props, reproducing celebrated characters belonging to the upper classes, they gradually left the carnivalesque world of the fair to become an index of class, the newly rich often buying waxes to display them at home.<sup>9</sup> Throughout the novel, Jarley's waxworks, like Tussaud's, blend instruction and entertainment. Among the 'effigies of celebrated characters' (181), King George the Third and Mary Queen of Scots, as specimens representing the monarchy, are exhibited next to Jasper Packlemerton, who murdered his fourteen wives, the old lady who died of dancing at age 132 and the woman who poisoned fourteen families with pickled walnuts. Furthermore, Jarley's slogans, saying that her waxworks are 'the delight of the Nobility and Gentry' or that 'The Royal Family are the patrons of Jarley' (172), advertise the waxworks as landmarks in British history, the collection being designed

7 Frost, *The Old Showmen and the Old London Fairs*, 310.

8 The reference to old giants who are kept in caravans and are waited upon by dwarfs because they become weak upon their legs may be an allusion to the Irish giant Patrick O'Brien (in fact Cotter) who exhibited himself at Bartholomew Fair but found it difficult to maintain an upright position; Frost, *The Old Showmen and the Old London Fairs*, 196.

9 Pilbeam, *Madame Tussaud*, 13–15.

to 'refine the mind, cultivate the taste, and enlarge the sphere of human understanding' (183).

The example of Dickens's Mrs Jarley's wax exhibition in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, oscillating as it does between the world of the fair and a bourgeois realm linked with taste and education, is significant. It not only reveals Dickens's fascination with waxes,<sup>10</sup> but also typifies the way in which Dickens's novel plays upon a series of motifs borrowed from his contemporary culture and which will be found in later novels. The novel's association of waxes with women, the feminine ideal, the Victorian bourgeoisie, freaks and criminals, and even with death, as when the doll-like little Nell looks eternally frozen in death at the end of the novel,<sup>11</sup> is of particular interest, for it paves the way for one of Dickens's most sensational villainesses: Miss Havisham. Indeed, as this essay will show, *Great Expectations*, published two decades later, reactivates such connections between waxworks, artificiality, femininity and death. In *Great Expectations*, Miss Havisham, the witch-like lady who has stopped all the clocks on her aborted wedding day, is also compared to a waxwork from the fair. Dressed in her bridal gown, with only one shoe on, Havisham looks like a macabre Cinderella. However, her connection with the waxworks at the fair also shapes her as a morbid Sleeping Beauty, waiting for her bridegroom to come back, as the novel links the aestheticization of women to the medical world, using hints at anatomical practice to construct secrecy. In doing so, I contend, the waxwork motifs which permeate the narrative have an hermeneutic function, guiding hero and readers towards the discovery of the truth, as they take to pieces the body of the text as one would disassemble an anatomical Venus.

10 Dickens published several articles on waxes in *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*. See, for instance, Charles Dickens, 'History in Wax', *Household Words* 9 (18 Feb. 1854), 17–20.

11 The association of Jarley's waxes with death is also manifest when Nell sees a likeness between the dwarf and the 'death-like faces' of the waxes (184), turning the waxworks into sinister artworks.

## Waxworks and Ideal/Morbid Femininity

Although published in 1861, *Great Expectations* opens in the 1830s, Pip starting his story in the days 'long before the days of photographs',<sup>12</sup> that is, before Fox Talbot's invention of photographic prints in 1839. The novel thus takes place before mid-century, which explains why Pip borrows from the world of fairs and popular entertainments to shape his experience as he discovers a mysterious character – Miss Havisham – who lives secluded in a Gothic mansion, having stopped watches and clocks at twenty minutes to nine since the day when she was jilted by her lover as she was getting dressed for her wedding. Significantly, Pip's discovery of Miss Havisham's society is depicted in terms reminiscent of the world of the theatre – a realm where acting – or *shaming* – reigns supreme. As he first enters Miss Havisham's room, a disembodied voice tells Pip to step in. The voice is the first spectral image Pip encounters, soon followed by a network of allusions to the ghostly and ghastly body of Miss Havisham. As in a phantasmagoria, the room on the other side of the door, artificially lit by wax candles, suggests how deceptive reality can be as Pip mistakes tatters for rich materials and a corpse-like woman for a rich and beautiful lady:

[P]rominent in [the room] was a draped table with a gilded looking-glass, and that I made out at first sight to be a fine lady's dressing-table.

Whether I should have made out this object so soon, if there had been no fine lady sitting at it, I cannot say. In an armchair, with an elbow resting on the table and her head leaning on that hand, sat the strangest lady I have ever seen, or shall ever see.

She was dressed in rich materials – satins, and lace, and silks – all of white. Her shoes were white. And she had a long white veil dependent from her hair, and she had bridal flowers in her hair, but her hair was white. Some bright jewels sparkled on her neck, and on her hands, and some other jewels lay sparkling on the table. Dresses, less splendid than the dress she wore, and half-packed trunks, were scattered about.

12 Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* [1861] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 3. Further references to this edition will be given in the text.

It was not in the first moments that I saw all these things, though I saw more of them in the first moments than might be supposed. But, I saw that everything within my view which ought to be white, had been white long ago, and had lost its lustre, and was faded and yellow. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes. I saw that the dress had been put upon the rounded figure of a young woman, and that the figure upon which it now hung loose, had shrunk to skin and bone. Once, I had been taken to see some ghastly wax-work at the Fair, representing I know not what impossible personage lying in state. Once, I had been taken to one of our old marsh churches to see a skeleton in the ashes of a rich dress, that had been dug out of a vault under the church pavement. Now, wax-work and skeleton seemed to have dark eyes that moved and looked at me. (56–7)

Miss Havisham's pose, her head leaning on her hand, and the scattered dresses all around her, suggestive of costumes, construct the character as an actress. Pip's perceptual delusion, as he suddenly realizes he has been dazzled by the profusion of wealth, is presented as an anamorphosis. The play on perspective, recalling baroque *memento mori*, just like the looking glass, suggestive of a *vanitas*, foreshadows the comparison of Miss Havisham with a skeleton and a waxwork representing a corpse.<sup>13</sup> However, the images soon become much more modern and typically anchored in the Victorian visual culture. The importance of sight, underlined by the repetitions of 'I saw', enhances Pip's scopic desire, increasingly staging the scene as a show. The eyes, becoming animated, turn the skeleton and waxwork into mechanical contrivances, such as automata, developing further the numerous allusions to phantasmagorias and other Victorian optical gadgetry that permeate the narrative.

Moreover, as a 'personage lying in state', Miss Havisham recalls many popular figures of the time. The wax effigy Pip has in mind may be one of the models of royals which appeared in many a wax exhibition both in fairs and in museums, such as Tussaud's, like that of George IV, as already

13 Dickens owned a copy of *The Dance of Death* (1833) by F. Douce, which included engravings by Hans Holbein, hence the haunting quality of his skeletons in many of his novels. Mary Elizabeth Hotz, *Literary Remains: Representations of Death and Burial in Victorian England* (New York: State University of New York, 2009), 188.

mentioned, which fascinated Dickens. Many coronation displays were exhibited at Tussaud's, an institution which very much promoted and popularized the monarchy, as with the coronation of George IV or the model of Queen Victoria which participated in maintaining the queen's visibility even after her retreat following Prince Albert's death in 1861.<sup>14</sup> The link with the monarchy strengthens Pip's vision of Miss Havisham's social class as different from his own, the image encapsulating inaccessibility. But the wax also plays its 'democratic' function, annihilating social boundaries between viewers and the represented celebrities – and even sometimes enabling the public to touch them. The waxwork in the narrative thus captures the tension between social distance and social proximity that pervades Dickens's novel.

In addition, the waxwork betokens Pip's refusal to acknowledge the reality of Miss Havisham's corpse-like appearance, her body shrunk to skin and bone ('It was not in the first moments that I saw all these things, though I saw more of them in the first moments than might be supposed'). Wax displaces and replaces the gruesome body. Wax models of royal characters had been used since the fifteenth century to display kings and queens without fearing decomposition. Similarly, dressed in bridal attire, Miss Havisham's wax-like and virginal corpse highlights her attempt at arresting physical decomposition and counteracting time and death. The wax model thus typifies the narrative's interplay with anxieties related to time and bodily decay, more especially so when Miss Havisham wishes to be laid upon the table when dead, with people coming and looking at her – 'the complete realisation of the ghastly waxwork at the fair' (83).

Laid upon the table, as both female corpse and artwork, Havisham's body is very much redolent of the wax anatomical models that were popular in the mid-eighteenth century and throughout the Victorian period, as

14 Tussaud's sumptuous costumes, symbolizing Tussaud's support of the monarchy, were also criticized. In an 1846 cartoon, *Punch* derided Tussaud's advertisement by using paupers as exhibited specimens. The cartoon mocked the snobbish tone of Tussaud's advertising, promising middle-class ladies and gentlemen an insight into the social conditions of the British population at the time of the famine in Ireland and when there was widespread poverty in England.

exemplified by the anatomical Venuses displayed both in medical museums and at fairs. These models, such as those of the Specola, which opened in Florence in 1775, made directly from cadavers and designed as substitutes of the dead body, were used in medical education in order to teach the mechanisms of the human body. The wax substitutes enabled medical professionals to teach human anatomy without resorting to corpses at a time when the supply in cadavers was scarce.<sup>15</sup> However, such anatomical waxes, though modelled from cadavers, represented female *bodies* much more than corpses. Hardly any trace of bodily decomposition ever appeared on Florentine waxes, the waxworks looking like female sleepers and often even ornamented with rich accessories. In fact, the anatomical models, blending art and science, were conceived as objects of the gaze – ideal bodies revealing their secrets to medical professionals. These anatomical Venuses also circulated in fairs and anatomical museums open to the public (although frequently for men only), especially in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1839, Antonio Sarti, a Florentine, ran an exhibition on 27 Margaret Street, showing a Venus that could be taken apart, like Dr Joseph Kahn's, whose Venus was made up of eighty-five pieces, or J.W. Reimer's, whose Anatomical and Ethnological Museum opened as well in London in 1853.<sup>16</sup> When away from the world of medical education, however, anatomical Venuses fed the public's appetite for the macabre and the erotic. The normative and idealized female body was offered to the gaze of (often male) viewers, its parts gradually taken away in a morbid strip-tease.

Introducing herself as a woman with a broken heart, Miss Havisham defines her body in mechanical terms, the play on the broken heart suggesting parallels between the state of her house, with clocks stopped at twenty minutes to nine, and her physiology which seems to have gone wrong. The metaphor thus constructs her as an anatomical Venus, made up of multiple pieces likely to be disassembled. But Miss Havisham also recalls one of the most famous mechanical automata displayed in the

15 From 1832 the changes in the legislation, with the Anatomy Act regulating dissection, facilitated the supply of cadavers in England.

16 Pilbeam, *Madame Tussaud*, 137–9.



nineteenth century: Madame Tussaud's *Sleeping Beauty* – Madame du Barry's wax model – which again connects Dickens's female character with the world of waxwork exhibitions.<sup>17</sup> Du Barry's 'breathing' wax model had a mechanical beating heart, and her chest could be seen rising as she lay asleep on a sofa, disturbingly disrupting the boundaries between the real and the artificial as between the animate and the inanimate. The model had been made by Curtius (Marie Grosholtz's, later Tussaud's, 'uncle'), and inherited by Madame Tussaud after his death. Philippe Curtius (1737–94) was a doctor who had left his medical career to set up a wax exhibition in Paris. His waxwork of Jeanne du Barry (Louis XV's mistress), made in 1765, was the starting point and a significant landmark in the history of waxworks.

Throughout *Great Expectations*, the multiple associations of Miss Havisham with contemporary models of *Sleeping Beauties* demonstrate how both anatomical Venuses and automata linked death and wax, framing the body in representation, women being more often than not 'subjects to this imaging', in Giuliana Bruno's terms.<sup>18</sup> In fact, as Bruno contends, just like anatomical Venuses, the 'fascination for automata, which extended from the eighteenth through the nineteenth centuries was embedded in the struggle against decay', as 'movement transformed the inorganic into organic matter'.<sup>19</sup> Like an automaton, Miss Havisham repeats identical words ('Play! Play! Play') and movements, walking 'round and round the room' (83); her movements are also suddenly arrested, Pip describing the stopping of her body parts one after another as if she were made of independent pieces:

[Miss Havisham's] face had dropped into a watchful and brooding expression – most likely when all the things about her had become transfixed – and it looked as if nothing

17 Let us add here that Tussaud's was careful never to include anatomical models in the exhibition in order to make sure that it would not be confused with fair exhibitions and because the institution was wary of the Obscene Publications Act of 1857.

18 Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* (London: Verso, 2002), 149.

19 Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 147.

could ever lift it up again. Her chest had dropped, so that she stooped; and her voice had dropped, so that she spoke low, and with a dead lull upon her; altogether, she had the appearance of having dropped, body and soul, within and without, under the weight of a crushing blow. (60)

The construction of Miss Havisham as a character out of Madame Tussaud's museum is further emphasized when Pip relates his visit to his sister, Joe and Pumblechook. Pip believes that 'if [he] described Miss Havisham's as [his] eyes had seen it, [he] should not be understood' (64). Worse, Miss Havisham, herself, would not be understood. The story he then makes up, as he faces an eager audience, with Pumblechook 'prey[ing] upon by a devouring curiosity' and 'gaping over in his chaise-cart' (65) reinforces the connections between Miss Havisham and the world of waxworks. Indeed, Pip portrays her sitting in her room in a black velvet coach eating cake on a gold plate while dogs fight for veal cutlets out of a silver basket. The flags, swords and pistols Pip plays with, alongside the other 'marvels' (68) of the room are reminiscent of some of the exhibits at Tussaud's, notably the tableaux, or Napoleon's Waterloo carriage which was exhibited in 1843 and could be used as a kitchen, a dining-room, a study, a bathroom or even a bedroom. All the kitchen utensils were gold and silver and visitors could even climb aboard the carriage.<sup>20</sup>

Interestingly, Dickens's Miss Havisham brings to light the extent to which the relationship between automata, female physiology and the feminine ideal embodied by Tussaud's Sleeping Beauty were quite representative of mid-Victorian definitions of femininity. The figure of the automaton easily emblemized woman's subjection to the forces of her body, as defined by contemporary medical discourse. The passivity of Sleeping Beauty, furthermore, strengthened woman's helplessness, both biological and cultural. The construction of woman as a passive automaton permeated exhibitions, Tussaud's Sleeping Beauty being a case in point. Even dolls were aligned with anatomical models, both underlining ideals of normality, both framing the female body the better to control it. A significant example may be found in an article entitled 'Dolls', published in *Household Words* in 1853.

20 Pilbeam, *Madame Tussaud*, 113.

In the article, dolls are like 'watch[es]';<sup>21</sup> the reviewer explains, drawing parallels between the toys and contemporary mechanical conceptions of human physiology. '[H]umanized', their eyes 'made by the same persons as those who manufacture eyes for human creatures' so as to 'bear a resemblance to nature' and their hair often being human hair,<sup>22</sup> dolls, with their 'life-like truthfulness',<sup>23</sup> are devised as doubles of the little girls who will play with them. Inevitably, the comparison also shapes little girls as dolls, female physiology being consequently aligned with a watch mechanism. More significantly still, the article shifts from the manufacturing of dolls to wax-dolls – such as Madame Napoleon Montanari's wax-dolls exhibited at the Great Exhibition and displaying the different stages of femininity. In addition, the parallel between dolls and girls growing into women is furthered when the reviewer proceeds to explain the links between wax modelling and anatomical models. Dr. Auzoux's papier-maché life-sized anatomical models, showing the workings of the human body in all its minute details,<sup>24</sup> are very much similar to automata, he argues. Thus, the article, connecting dolls, girls, waxworks, anatomical models and automata reveals the ways in which medical discourse, in particular physiology, informed mid-Victorian definitions of women. Throughout the Victorian period, the development of medical science gave rise to an increasingly mechanistic vision of female physiology which constantly underlined the necessity for medical professionals to control the forces to which women seemed subjected. The anatomical Venuses and other waxwork models of ideal women therefore both conveyed and reinforced contemporary associations between woman and the body.

21 [George Dodd], 'Dolls', *Household Words* 7 (168) (11 June 1853), 352–6, 353.

22 [Dodd], 'Dolls', 353.

23 [Dodd], 'Dolls', 354.

24 [Dodd], 'Dolls', 355.

## Feasting on Sleeping Beauty: Waxworks and Secrecy

Although anatomical Venuses and other sleeping beauties embodied the Victorian ideal of feminine weakness, passivity and vulnerability – images of ideal womanhood heavily influenced by contemporary medical discourses – Dickens's Miss Havisham is far from being a passive virgin awaiting her prince or a female corpse submitting to the anatomist's blade and compliantly awaiting dissection. The 'sleep-death equation',<sup>25</sup> which enabled nineteenth-century artists to portray passive sensuality and avoid morbidity is undermined in *Great Expectations*. Indeed, the narrative highlights tensions regarding Miss Havisham's body, particularly using the Gothic paraphernalia to metaphorize the villainess's corporeality. As already argued, one of the motifs which connect Miss Havisham to Sleeping Beauty may be her wish to be laid on the table after her death and remain forever available to the gaze of her friends who may 'feast upon [her]' (86). In Charles Perrault's 'Sleeping Beauty', Sleeping Beauty's stepmother is an ogress who wishes to eat Sleeping Beauty and her children with 'sauce Robert'. Similarly, in *Great Expectations* the play on the term 'feast' blends the issue of the female body available to the (male) gaze with that of food, Miss Havisham's body replacing the wedding cake. Moreover, the 'crawling things' (83) Pip notices on the table, the 'speckled-legged spiders with blotchy bodies', beetles and mice, as so many scavengers, hint at the bodily dissolution of Dickens's Sleeping Beauty, turning the sight of eternal youth into a macabre spectacle of decomposition.

Inevitably, such allusions to Miss Havisham's corporeality shatter the reassuring image of wholeness emblemized by Sleeping Beauty's body eternally frozen in youth and evading death. Miss Havisham, who has locked herself up in Satis House, is a morbid Sleeping Beauty, her 'corpse-like' appearance (59) giving a twist to stereotypical representations of ideal femininity locked in virginity. Furthermore, the spectral bride is also seen

25 Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 62.

as a mummy threatened to be struck to dust if taken into the natural light (59), a death-in-life figure signalling instability, her body likely to fall into dust and disappear. Thus, if the image of Sleeping Beauty's crystallized body promised eternal life, Dickens's gothic paraphernalia dooms the female body to decomposition. As 'yellow skin and bone' (84), Miss Havisham's body is an envelope hosting a skeleton, her lack of fleshliness pointing even more powerfully to her material body, as a corpse urging anatomists to investigate it before putrefaction sets in.

As Elisabeth Bronfen has argued, the dead woman was a topos in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century culture.<sup>26</sup> Whether dead or in a trance, corpse-like women haunted the period. Often portrayed as neither dead nor alive, dead women were stereotypically white and pure – immaculate – in their eternal sleep. However, they were also seen as mysterious and unfathomable, most especially so in scenes of dissection featuring anatomists dealing with dead female bodies. These Sleeping Beauties uncannily hovered between stereotypes of virginal femininity (safely protected from temptation by death) and corpses hosting mysteries likely to escape the anatomist once decomposition starts. In J.H. Hasselhorst's *The Dissection of a Young, Beautiful Woman by J.CH.G. Lucas (1814–85) in order to Determine the Ideal Female Proportions* (1864), Gabriel von Max's *Der Anatom* (1869) or even Enrique Simonet y Lombardo's *Anatomy of the Heart* (1899) at the end of the century, the white virgins lying on the anatomists' tables look like so many Sleeping Beauties eternally sleeping. Yet their skin, like a sheet or shroud covering the mysteries of the female body, lures the anatomists, inviting them to lift it. As Bronfen argues, even as the painted female corpse 'signifies an immaculate, immobile form, [this form of beauty] potentially contains its own destruction, its division into parts'.<sup>27</sup> The corpse, as representation, is thus stuck in limbo – seemingly stopping time and denying bodily dissolution while simultaneously pointing to its inevitable decomposition.

26 Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

27 Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, 5.

In *Great Expectations*, the body of Miss Havisham magnifies such tensions. As Sleeping Beauty, the character promises revelation, matching Pip's fairy tale ideals and his belief that he is meant to 'restore the desolate house, admit the sunshine into the dark rooms, set the clocks a going and the cold hearths a blazing, tear down the cobwebs, destroy the vermin – in short, do all the shining deeds of the young Knight of romance, and marry the Princess' (229); as corpse, she threatens to deny access to the truth, concealing secrets locked away forever. As both a self-constructed passive body and a plot-maker or puppet-master directing Pip and Estella's romance, Miss Havisham brings to light the contradictions inherent in the image of Victorian Sleeping Beauties. In doing so, Dickens's Sleeping Beauty, likely to break up into pieces and disintegrate, reflects the narrative mechanisms of the novel, as Pip tries to reassemble the pieces of the puzzle and unveil the secrets of Estella's or his benefactor's identity. Indeed, the failed romance of Dickens's Sleeping Beauty introduces the issues of femininity, sexuality and death in the narrative, constructing the female body as a site of mystery the better to metaphorize the secrets of the text. It is the path away from the fairy tale and the glamorous world of the theatre, of exhibitions and artificiality that Pip must find, learning that being a gentleman does not simply mean wearing fine clothes and having an education. The world of wax exhibitions, its artificiality, its costumes and its Sleeping Beauties thus paves the way for Pip's apprenticeship, especially as its macabre atmosphere takes the hero to London where wax signals crime and its punishment.

## Macabre Exhibitions: Waxworks and Crime

At the beginning of Wilkie Collins's *The Legacy of Cain* (1888), a murderess is about to be executed. A few days before her execution, she asks the governor of the prison to promise to bury her with her cap still on her face. A year before, as she explains, she had seen waxworks and portraits of criminals. In one of them made right after the execution, the face was

swollen and hideous due to death by suffocation. The villainess's fear that she might be seen with such swollen features recalls that in the nineteenth century crime was not only believed to be legible on people's faces, as physiognomy and phrenology posited and as theories of criminal anthropology asserted; it also remained visible after death. As a matter of fact, casts of criminals were made after their execution, wax modellers like Curtius and Tussaud competing with surgeons and anatomists to reproduce, preserve and display criminals.

The connection between the world of waxworks exhibitions and criminality may be situated as early as at the beginning of the eighteenth century. In 1717, the surgeon Guillaume Denoues (1650–1735) opened the first anatomical museum with wax models in Paris. In 1721 he added a wax model of the renowned thief Cartouche (Louis-Dominique Bourignon). His model was an early example of the interest in criminals' physiognomical (or phrenological) features, laying the foundations for nineteenth-century collections of criminal anthropology.<sup>28</sup> At the end of the eighteenth century Madame Tussaud's 'uncle', Philippe Curtius, ran two exhibitions in Paris, one in the Palais Royal, the Salon de Cire, from 1776, the other, the Caverne des Grands Voleurs which opened on the Boulevard du Temple in 1782.<sup>29</sup> The two distinct exhibitions clearly separated respectable and fashionable figures dressed in court robes and rich garments from criminals. The interest in criminality which Curtius's salon highlighted was also exploited by Madame Tussaud in England. When the place of execution of criminals was moved from Tyburn to Newgate in 1783, using a scaffold with a drop to hang criminals (instead of a cart), the number of executions declined, reducing the number of entertainments for people eager to look at the writhing bodies of murderers choking to death. Hence the popularity of Madame Tussaud's 'Chamber of Horrors', as *Punch* had called the room in 1846, which offered portraits of British murderers whose models were

28 Michel Lemire, *Artistes et Mortels* (Paris: Chabaud, 1990), 74.

29 Curtius also exhibited Vaucanson's automata at the Salon de Cire, while natural specimens, such as giants or freaks were displayed at the Caverne des Grands Voleurs. Lemire, *Artistes et Mortels*, 88.

sometimes made from death masks made by surgeons.<sup>30</sup> *Great Expectations* was published just as the Chamber of Horrors had been expanded (in 1860), including a 'Chamber of Comparative Physiognomy'.<sup>31</sup> At the time, criminals sentenced to death penalty even gave their clothes to Tussaud's before their executions, and Tussaud's bought the contents of famous murder rooms for their tableaux.

It is thus not coincidental that in *Great Expectations* wax should be linked to punishment<sup>32</sup> and that the world of wax exhibitions court that of criminality. Throughout the novel, the motifs which associate waxwork exhibitions with the realm of death are in fact the same as those which are used to define crime. The dust and the mould which cover the room where the wedding table has been laid in Satis House, as evidence of Sleeping Beauty's decomposition, are found again in London, this time associated with Newgate, as when Pip feels 'contaminated' by the dust on his feet and in his lungs (261). The disease metaphor, together with the way in which the dust is related to Pip's body, penetrating his organism, strengthen the parallel between the two places. In addition, the motif of the scaffold, which Pip had associated with Magwitch in the opening chapter, appears as well when Pip leaves Satis House after his first visit. The sight of Miss Havisham hanging on a great wooden beam by the neck connects the two characters, giving ominous tinges to the fairy godmother very early in the narrative. Furthermore, the candles, which encapsulate artificiality and the make-believe world of Satis House, reappear in Jaggers's office, this

30 This was the case of the Red Barn Murder with William Corder, who had killed his fiancée Maria Martin; Pilbeam, *Madame Tussaud*, 101–2. The portraits of the famous body-snatchers Burke and Hare may also be mentioned here. Burke was modelled by Tussaud during the trial, Tussaud's sons completed Hare and a cast of Burke's head was done three hours after the execution; Pauline Chapman, *Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors: Two Hundred Years of Crime* (London: Constable, 1984), 43–6.

31 Pilbeam, *Madame Tussaud*, 159.

32 Humorously enough, Tickler, which Pip's sister uses to beat him, is a 'wax-ended piece of cane' (9).



time 'decorated with dirty winding-sheets, as if in remembrance of a host of hanged clients' (384).

More significantly perhaps, the casts of hanged criminals in Jaggers's office offer a much more macabre vision of the world of waxwork exhibitions. Mr Jaggers is Pip's guardian whom Pip had met at Miss Havisham's (hence his belief that Havisham is his benefactress). His office is another Gothic realm – a dismal place with the skylight 'patched like a broken head' (162), Jaggers's chair looking like a coffin and two casts of hanged criminals with swollen faces exhibited on a shelf. Like Miss Havisham's body, which is either compared to a waxwork resisting bodily decomposition or to an embalmed corpse likely to crumble into dust, the casts are unstable motifs. Though made of wax, the artificial reproductions of the criminals are surrounded by flies which settle on them as on decomposing bodies and appear animated every time Pip notices them. Tellingly, Jaggers, whose hands smell of scented soap, reminding Pip of doctors (81), washes 'his clients off, as if he were a surgeon' (208). Holding a penknife, he reads people's bodies like an anatomist, as when he reads power in Molly's hands, 'coolly tracing out the sinews with his forefinger' (212). The network of motifs evokes the world of anatomy, recalling how murderers' bodies were handed to surgeons and anatomists after their execution in order to be dissected: the casts, therefore, unite the legal and medical fields.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, crime, the casts suggest, can be exhibited. When Pip later travels with two convicts, their keeper is compared to a Curator, the prisoners making 'an interesting Exhibition not formally open at the moment' (224). This 'most disagreeable and degraded spectacle' (225) is found again in Wemmick's 'museum', as he keeps in a 'chamber of the Castle' a 'collection

33 The beginning of anatomy legislation may be traced back to 1540, when Henry VIII allowed anatomists the use of the bodies of four hanged felons per year. This allowance was extended to six by Charles II, until the 1752 Murder Act granted anatomists the use of all the criminals hanged at Tyburn and later Newgate from 1783. The 1832 Anatomy Act radically reformed anatomy, granting anatomists the right to use unclaimed pauper bodies from workhouses. See Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* [1987] (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

of curiosities' (207). The latter are items that belonged to the criminals who were hanged, including human remains, such as locks of hair. This echoes the image of Miss Havisham as anatomical model,<sup>34</sup> the wax metaphor blurring the boundary between the medical world and that of exhibitions, all the more so as Newgate is an entertaining place very similar to wax exhibitions. Indeed, as Pip is waiting for Jaggers, he walks out of the office and takes a look at Newgate. A drunk minister of justice invites him to step in and hear a trial: for half a crown, Pip should 'command a full view of the Lord Chief Justice in his wig and robes – mentioning that awful personage like waxwork, and presently offering him at the reduced price of eighteen pence' (164).

In fact, the relationship between waxworks and crime which is developed throughout the narrative gradually guides the reader towards the truth, suggesting that the motif of wax works in tandem with secrets which Pip must discover. Jaggers is the man who is 'more in the secrets of [Newgate] than any man in London' (265) and his casts function as landmarks in the novel, appearing every time Pip is about to discover something. Pip notices them on the shelf each time he enters Jaggers's office; they also become animated each time the narrative refuses to lift up the veil on a character's identity. Pip remarks their swollen faces when he meets Jaggers's mysterious housekeeper, Molly (198); they seem to eavesdrop on the conversation or to be about to sneeze on the day when Pip comes of age, Jaggers refusing to reveal the identity of Pip's benefactor (282); they try to open their eyelids when Jaggers asks Pip under what name Magwitch has written to him (333); they seem to play bo-peep when Pip tries to connect Estella and Molly; they look as if they were smelling fire when Pip conceals his identity to send nine hundred pounds to Herbert (404).

As a result, the casts pave the way for Pip's discovery of the truth and for his self-discovery, playing a significant part in the *Bildungsroman*. As already argued, the hero's maturation depends on his relinquishing of the fairy tale scenario with its macabre Sleeping Beauties and Cinderellas. The motif of wax, as malleable material, thus aptly shapes the hero's modelling

34 Human hair and teeth were used by wax modellers like Curtius and Tussaud.

into an adult, more especially so because it is associated with forms of visual education and amusement like waxworks. As suggested, wax, as representation, particularly epitomized the desire to freeze the body so as to 'harness the emotion of the body and its temporal history'.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, as Pip and the reader discover, the comparison of Miss Havisham to a waxwork, just like the hints at female physiology associated with anatomical Venuses, encapsulate the mechanization of her feelings, ultimately highlighting the character's heartlessness. Dickens's *Sleeping Beauty* is but an automaton, a stereotype which illuminates the reification of individuals in mid-Victorian England. As an animated doll unable to feel, Miss Havisham threatens to contaminate Pip and shape him as another 'model with a mechanical heart to practise on' (319). From the beginning, indeed, Pip is a 'young parcel of bones' (75), his 'anatomy' noticed by Herbert 'as if he were minutely choosing his bone' (90) the first time he meets him, or by Miss Havisham who seems to 'pry into [his] heart and probe its wounds' (298). The physical description of the hero as a series of bones or as a body likely to be opened hints again at the world of anatomy and its anatomical models, the better to show how Dickens's characters all flirt with mechanization. However, as Pip gradually realizes, becoming a gentleman does not simply mean wearing fine clothes as so many costumes and exhibiting one's 'mechanical appearance' (170), like Wemmick. On the contrary, it means empathizing with others regardless of their social class and experiencing feelings and emotions. The motif of the waxwork, which, as we have seen, is closely related to secrecy throughout the novel, therefore eventually emblemizes repression, more especially so, perhaps, because of its connections with death.

As a result, if wax was used throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to mask death and master emotions related to the body, by the end of the novel, it becomes obvious that the network of motifs referring to wax in manifold situations and places is used to signal the reification and mechanization of feelings, as if this was the ultimate secret Pip needed to unveil. Because, the novel shows, repression works in tandem with crime and death, Dickens's characters – crushed by blows, turned into automata,

35 Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 149.

grotesquely disguised until they look like corpses (like Magwitch whose dressing up has the ‘effect of rouge upon the dead’, 334) – must therefore learn to open up their hearts and let out their tears, even if Dickens’s prince is finally denied marriage to his princess and his Sleeping Beauty eventually crumbles into dust.

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MANUELA D'AMORE

## Engendering Creative Negativity: Anne Thackeray Ritchie's *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood* (1866)

When will the hundred summers die,  
And thought and time be born again,  
And newer knowledge, drawing nigh,  
Bring truth that sways the soul of men?  
Here all things in their place remain,  
As all were order'd, ages since.  
Come, Care and Pleasure, Hope and Pain,  
And bring the fated fairy Prince.

— ALFRED TENNYSON, *The Day Dream*

### Anne Thackeray Ritchie: Her 'Little' Writing and 'Mild' Revolution

A unique 'personage', greatly admired by her father, William Makepeace Thackeray, and by most leading figures of the Victorian Age – Robert Browning, Robert Louis Stevenson and George Eliot,<sup>1</sup> to name only a

1 Anne Thackeray Ritchie was always considered a 'man of genius' by her father, William Makepeace Thackeray, and a unique 'personage' by Matthew Arnold, Leslie Stephen, and Algernon Charles Swinburne. That was evidence of 'the esteem with which she was regarded', and suggested 'her extraordinary qualities'. See Lillian F. Shankman, ed., *Anne Thackeray Ritchie. Journals and Letters* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1994), x.

few – Anne Thackeray Ritchie (1837–1919)<sup>2</sup> was unexpectedly forgotten before her death. It was 1919 when Virginia Woolf wrote her obituary essay about her ‘Aunt Anny’ for the *Times Literary Supplement*: she wondered why ‘a writer capable of such wit, such fantasy, marked by such a distinct and delightful personality, [was] not at least as famous as Mrs Gaskell, or as popular as Anthony Trollope’, and part of her answer was that none of the works in her massive production – prefaces, critical essays, biographies, memoirs, fairy tales, and novels – had ever warranted the label of ‘masterpiece’.<sup>3</sup>

Was Thackeray Ritchie’s *oeuvre* only made of ‘little’ writing, then?<sup>4</sup> Modern and contemporary critics would still argue so, yet it is not possible to undervalue her original contributions to the literary scene of the time. In fact, she was simply more than the author of *Records of Tennyson, Ruskin, Robert and Elizabeth Browning* (1892) or the editor of the twenty-six-volume *Centenary Biographical Edition* of the works of her father (1910–11): *Toilers and Spinsters and Other Essays* (1874), *A Book of Sibyls: Mrs Barbauld, Mrs Edgeworth, Mrs Opie, Miss Austen* (1883), *Blackstick Papers* (1908), and *From the Porch* (1913). These works clearly reveal her piecemeal approach and express her interest both in women’s concerns and, as Hanbery MacKay adds, *modus operandi*.<sup>5</sup> Taken from

- 2 Detailed biographical information on Anne Thackeray Ritchie can be found in Winifred Gérin, *Anne Thackeray Ritchie: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); as well as in Henrietta Garnett, *Anny: A Life of Anne Thackeray Ritchie* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2004).
- 3 For further information on the phase in her career when she was forgotten, as well as on Virginia Woolf’s obituary essay and speculation about her, see Carol Hanbery MacKay, *Creative Negativity: Four Victorian Exemplars of the Female Quest* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 56.
- 4 The definition of Thackeray Ritchie’s production as made of ‘little writing’ is in Hanbery MacKay, *Creative Negativity*, 56. Even though a critical edition of her works is not available, yet, readers may want to consider Anne Thackeray Ritchie, *Works of Miss Thackeray* (Charleston: BiblioBazaar, 2010).
- 5 Hanbery MacKay was one of the first critics who drew the reader’s attention to Thackeray Ritchie’s special interest in gender issues. Going beyond her fiction, she

her critical essay on Jane Austen, the following paragraph represents her feminine model of literary writing:

She [Jane Austen] has a gift of telling a story in a way that has never been surpassed. She rules her places, times, characters, and marshals them with unerring precision. Her machinery is simple but complete; events group themselves so vividly and naturally in her mind that, in describing imaginary scenes, we seem not only to read them, but to live them, to see the people coming and going: the gentlemen courteous and in top-boots, the ladies demure and piquant; we can almost hear them talking to one another. No retrospects, no abrupt flights; as in real life, days and events follow one another.<sup>6</sup>

Thackeray Ritchie always appreciated the early nineteenth-century author's ability to 'see human nature as it was', to 'combine her picture by her genius, and colour it from life'.<sup>7</sup> Although she had learned a lot from her father-mentor<sup>8</sup> and could easily offer the reader photographic descriptions of her fictitious characters and settings, her priority was always to find fruitful links between past and present. In her view, tradition could be 'refashioned' and could even serve to represent the flaws in Victorian society: as an intellectual, and a well-connected member of the upper classes in London, she knew she could only go to the roots of literary genres, manipulate them, and prospect a 'revolution from within'.

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considered her criticism of Madame de Sévigné, Elizabeth Gaskell, Madame d'Aulnoy, and Maria Edgeworth. See Hanbery MacKay, *Creative Negativity*, 60.

6 Thackeray Ritchie, 'Jane Austen', in *Toilers and Spinsters* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1874), 45–6.

7 Thackeray Ritchie, 'Jane Austen', 48.

8 Evidence of Thackeray Ritchie's activity as her father's amanuensis can be found in Shankman, ed., *Journals and Letters*, ix–xiii.

## Samples of 'Creative Negativity': Refashioning and Engendering Fairy Tales

Rich in elements of (mild) social critique, Thackeray Ritchie's 'little' production also included forms of re-writing, particularly in the fascinating yet controversial field of fairy tales. *Five Old Friends and A Young Prince* (1868) was her first selection of Charles Perrault's and Madame Leprince de Beaumont's popular stories; then came *Bluebeard's Keys and Other Stories* (1874), *Da Capo and Other Tales* (1880), and *Miss Williamson's Divagations* (1881). 'Blend[ing] disparate elements, and cross[ing] generic boundaries, particularly [...] in relation to gender',<sup>9</sup> they were definitely more inventive than her novels, and were later considered a source of inspiration for Virginia Woolf's modernist work. *Orlando* is intertextually linked to Thackeray Ritchie's re-adaptation of 'Cinderella', and this shows that fairy tales as a genre helped her to develop 'a different vision of legacy', and find 'an alternative to patrilinear tradition'.<sup>10</sup>

Reading, (re-)writing, and (re-)interpreting: Thackeray Ritchie did not know the philosophical concept of 'experience' as a form of 'not-ness', the dialectical process leading to 'reversal and restructuring of awareness'.<sup>11</sup> Yet,

9 Hanbery MacKay, *Creative Negativity*, 60.

10 A thorough analysis of the influence that Thackeray Ritchie had on Virginia Woolf can be found in Ann Martin, *Red Riding Hood and the Wolf in Bed: Modernism's Fairy Tales* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 101–5; as well as in Hilary Newman, *Anne Thackeray Ritchie: Her Influence on the Work of Virginia Woolf* (London: Cecil Woolf, 2008).

11 The philosophical significance of the concept of 'creative negativity' is in Richard. E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics* (Evanstone: Northwestern University Press, 1969). The following passage in particular shows the relationship between Hegel and Gadamer, and defines 'experience' as a form of 'not-ness' and 'disillusionment'. See pages 195–6: 'According to Hegel, [...] experience always has the structure of a reversal or restructuring of awareness; it is a dialectical kind of movement. At the base of this tendency to reversal is an element of negativity: experience is first of all experience of "not-ness" – something is *not* as we had assumed.' It is 'a matter of multisided disillusionment based on expectation[.]' and 'it often suggests the pain of growth and understanding'.



especially the modernized versions of 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood', 'Cinderella', 'Beauty and the Beast', 'Little Red Riding Hood', and of 'Jack the Giant-Killer', which are part of *Five Old Friends and A Prince*,<sup>12</sup> can be seen as the product of her 'creative negativity', that is to say, of her ability to explore the complexities of life, and offer the reader not only valid alternatives, but also positive examples of 'self-creation'.<sup>13</sup> Of course her interest in experimenting with different patterns always needed to combine with tradition, and prospect, both at the level of art and of social critique, again a 'revolution from within'.<sup>14</sup>

One may ask: why did Thackeray Ritchie choose the fairy tale genre to denounce the flaws in the Victorian Age and the difficult condition of women? The answer may be found in Jack Zipes's *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*.<sup>15</sup> Firmly convinced of the socio-political significance of the Grimm brothers' production in particular, Zipes argues that 'reutilized tales *function against* conformation to the standard socialization process and are meant [...] for a different, more just society'. Needless to say, '[their] quality and radicalism vary from author to author and from generation to generation':<sup>16</sup> Charles Dickens, Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, and William

12 As has been said, there are no critical or annotated editions of Thackeray Ritchie's works. As regards *Five Old Friends and A Prince*, we shall consider the 1868 version, published in London by Smith, Elder, and Co. The collection, however, was also included in *The Writings of Anne Isabella Thackeray. With Illustrations* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1870).

13 The literary definition, as well as the high significance of 'negative creativity' in relation to gender can be found in Hanbery MacKay, *Creative Negativity*, 60. See also the section 'Miss Thackeray's Uses of Enchantment', in Shuli Barzilai, *Tales of Bluebeard and His Wives from Late Antiquity to Postmodern Times* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 68–82.

14 On Thackeray Ritchie's need to find a compromise between tradition and innovation, see Martin, *Red Riding Hood and the Wolf in Bed*, 105–6; and Barzilai, *Tales of Bluebeard and His Wives*, 68–82.

15 Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012).

16 Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, 57–78.

Makepeace Thackeray,<sup>17</sup> for instance, appropriated the original corpus of folklore materials not only to pay their tribute to the past, but also to subtly criticize the deleterious effects of the industrial revolution.<sup>18</sup>

If, on the one hand, it was almost as though they wanted to instill a spirit of moral protest in their readers, scholarly debate has proved that, on the other hand, the *Kunstmärchen* tradition was used differently by men and women writers.<sup>19</sup> Unwilling to be stereotyped as fantasists, and eager to be valued for their social realism, authors such as Mary Louisa Molesworth and Juliana Horatia Ewing tended to rewrite classic stories for children from an adult, often ironic perspective, even 'contesting male idealizations of a feminised innocence'.<sup>20</sup> As for Thackeray Ritchie, she too addressed her work to 'Grown Folks'<sup>21</sup> and was always interested in the 'manners of her age'. Again, evidence of her artistic priorities could be

- 17 A complete collection of Victorian fairy tales, including John Ruskin's *The King of the Golden River, or the Black Brothers* (1841), William Makepeace Thackeray's *The Rose and the Ring* (1855), Charles Dickens's *The Magic Fishbone* (1867), and Oscar Wilde's *The Happy Prince* (1888), is Michael Patrick Hearn, ed., *The Victorian Fairy Tale Book* (New York: Random House, 1988).
- 18 For more information on the use of fairy tales as a tool to criticize the Victorian Age, see Jack Zipes, ed., *Victorian Fairy Tales: The Revolt of the Fairies and Elves* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 1987).
- 19 For a detailed analysis of the difference between men and women authors' appropriation of the fairy tale tradition, see, among others, Nina Auerbach and U.C. Knoepfelmacher, eds, *Forbidden Journeys: Fairy Tales and Fantasies by Victorian Women Writers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 11–12; and Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, *Moulding the Female Body in Victorian Fairy Tales and Sensation Novels* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2007).
- 20 On Mary Louisa Molesworth (1839–1921), the author of *The Carved Lions* (1895), on Juliana Horatia Ewing (1841–85), famous for *Amelia and the Dwarfs* (1870) especially, and on their realistic tales, see U.C. Knoepfelmacher, *Ventures into Chiddland: Victorians, Fairy Tales, and Femininity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), xii.
- 21 Specific reference to Thackeray Ritchie's tales for 'Grown Folks', and their contribution to the *Kunstmärchen* tradition is in Auerbach and Knoepfelmacher, *Forbidden Journeys*, 13.

found in her essay on Jane Austen, where she seemed not only to appreciate her style, but also to consider it a strong reference point:

Jane Austen's hour must have been a midday hour; bright, unsuggestive, with objects standing clear, without relief or shadow. She did not write of herself, but of the manners of her age. This age is essentially an age of men and women of natural impressive emotion; little remains of starch, of powder, of courtly reserve. What we have lost in calm, in happiness, in tranquillity, we have gained in intensity. Our danger is now, not of expressing and feeling too little, but of expressing more than we feel.<sup>22</sup>

Thackeray Ritchie's comparison between the 'calm', 'happiness', and 'tranquillity' of Austen's times and the 'intensity' of the Victorian way of feeling is revealing. The editor of *Anne Thackeray Ritchie. Journals and Letters*, Lillian F. Shankman, confirms that she had an extraordinary 'psychological and observational acuity' and that she was always against social injustice and traditional gender roles.<sup>23</sup> In fact, she took steps from Austen; she modernized classic fairy tales and offered the reader realistic descriptions of patriarchal England. Although her tales had been written for the general public of adult readers, most of her stories were *on* women, thus, *for* women.

### *Five Old Friends and A Young Prince* (1866–1868): Female Agency and Social Critique

Fairy stories are everywhere and every-day. We are all princes and princesses in disguise, or ogres or wicked dwarfs. All these histories are the histories of human nature, which does not seem to change very much in a thousand years or so, and we don't get tired of the fairies because they are so true to it.<sup>24</sup>

22 Thackeray Ritchie, 'Jane Austen', in *Toilers and Spinners*, 51.

23 See Shankman's introduction to *Anne Thackeray Ritchie. Journals and Letters*, x.

24 Thackeray Ritchie, 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood', in *Five Old Friends and A Prince*, 2.

Thackeray Ritchie's most inventive collection of modernized fairy tales, *Five Old Friends and A Prince*, was serialized in *The Cornhill* since 1866, published in volume form in 1868 with the title *Fairy Tales for Grown Folks*, and very well received. It came after her first two novels, *The Story of Elizabeth* (1863) and *The Village on the Cliff* (1867), and it was the expression of a highly stimulating, productive period for her as a writer and as a (single) young woman. At that time, she was part of the London literary scene and artistic salons, she could rely on Tennyson's support, and could even enjoy her warm contacts with Browning. At a personal level, she had just separated from her sister, Minnie, and her husband, Leslie Stephen, and become more independent.<sup>25</sup>

The years 1866–77 were therefore extremely important for her. Compared to the beginning of her career, when 'her fictional efforts had been short',<sup>26</sup> in that period Thackeray Ritchie learned to make her works more solid at a structural level, to experiment with new literary patterns, and manipulate classic genres. What is more important, she gave voice to her strong interest in social and gender issues.

Despite these elements, however, *Five Old Friends and A Prince* is quite a traditional collection of short stories: they are told by a first-person narrator, Miss Williamson, in strict chronological order; the characters, living in an Anglo-French upper-class context, are either 'passive' yet 'desirable' women,<sup>27</sup> or strong, despotic men; happy endings are generally associated with a typically Victorian vision of marriage. As regards form, it is clear,

25 Background information on the years 1866–77, and on Thackeray Ritchie's difficult relationship with her sister and her husband, can be found in Shankman, ed., *Anne Thackeray Ritchie. Journals and Letters*, 155–8.

26 This is Shankman's comment on Thackeray Ritchie's past production. See her *Anne Thackeray Ritchie. Journals and Letters*, 159.

27 Here we briefly refer to Hélène Cixous's passage on 'The Sleeping Beauty' in *La Jeune Née*, or *The Newly Born Woman*. Textual, as well as bibliographic references will be given as an introduction to Section 4 of this paper.

polished, as well as rich in French sophisticated expressions.<sup>28</sup> Where does her innovation lie, then?

A possible answer is that Thackeray Ritchie always found it difficult to ignore or detach herself from her father's teachings. No doubt, she was against social and gender fixed roles; at a certain point in her career, she even advocated single women's independence in her essay 'Toilers and Spinsters'.<sup>29</sup> Her father's *The Rose and the Ring, or The History of Prince Giglio and Prince Bulbo*, though, had exercised a great influence on her. This book, issued by William Makepeace Thackeray for Christmas in 1854, had a distinct didactic message and it showed that fiction, even fairy tales, had to serve as a positive moral example for the common reader.<sup>30</sup>

She did her best to combine 'compatibility' and 'subversion' in a contemporary product which could be valid for all generations. And, interestingly, she chose to use her first-person narrator, Miss Williamson, as well as the female protagonists in *Five Old Friends* and *A Prince* to criticize the upper-class system of codes based on greed, self-interest and inequality. Young, innocent, and, again, 'passive' Cecilia, Ella, Belle and Patty<sup>31</sup> are all

28 The structure of the tales in *Five Old Friends* and *A Prince*, as well as most of its fictitious names are closely related to Thackeray Ritchie's own intellectual interests, and her personal experience. In particular, her father's name, William, helped her to create the character of Miss Williamson, her narrator; her past memories of France and command of the language certainly made her settings and style more appealing.

29 'Toilers and Spinsters', the essay that Thackeray Ritchie wrote in 1874, is very explicit about the possibilities that single women could have in London at the time: 'What possible reason can there be to prevent unmarried, any more than married, people from being happy (or unhappy), according to their circumstances – from enjoying other pleasures more lively than the griefs and sufferings of their neighbours? Are unmarried people shut out from all theatres, concerts, picture-galleries, parks, and galleries? May not they walk out on every day of the week?' Thackeray Ritchie, 'Toilers and Spinsters', 2.

30 The influence that William Makepeace Thackeray's *The Rose and the Ring, or The History of Prince Giglio and Prince Bulbo* (1855) had on his daughter's fairy tale writing has been investigated by Barzilai, *Tales of Bluebeard and His Wives*.

31 As we shall see in more details, Cecilia is the protagonist of 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood'; Ella is 'Cinderella'; Belle is the main character of 'Beauty and the Beast'; Patty of 'Little Red Riding Hood'.

against the idea that contrasts can derive from financial interests only; they consider true values the only source of happiness and are also spiritually detached from the metonymies of Victorian comfortable life: 'the great mass of furniture, servants, human creatures, animals, carriages, business, and pleasure engagements'.<sup>32</sup> The following passage, taken from 'Beauty and the Beast', shows that these women also have an irresistible attraction to secluded countryside areas, and generally long for a simple way of life:

She [Belle] could not help it, – a cottage in the country, ruin, roses, novelty, clean chintzes instead of damask, a little room with mignonette, cocks crowing, had a wicked, morbid attraction for her which she could not overcome. She had longed for such a life when she had gone down to stay with the Ogdens at Farmborough last month, and had seen several haystacks and lovely little thatched cottages, where she had felt she would have liked to spend the rest of her days; one in particular had taken her fancy, with dear little latticed windows and a pigeon-cote, and two rosy little babies with a kitten toddling out from the ivy porch; [...] but here a sob from Fanny brought Belle back to her place in the barouche.<sup>33</sup>

The contrast between the more conventional characters and the female protagonists in the collection, however, could also be found in their ability to enjoy brief, but precious moments of freedom. In fact, they are often in direct contact with nature, and eager to appreciate all forms of pantheistic pleasures. In 'Cinderella', for instance, Ella is all alone in the fields, and even loses her human traits: she is 'strong and light', she 'jumps' up in the air, she 'sings higher and higher'. For the 'naughty boy' in the voyeuristic scene below, she is a 'fairy':

One day a naughty boy, who had run away, for a lark, from his tutor and his school-room at Cliffe, hard by, and who was hiding in a ditch, happened to see Ella alone in a field. She was looking up at the sky, and down at the pretty scarlet and white pimpernels, and listening to the birds. Suddenly she felt so strong and so light, and as if she *must* jump about a little, she was so happy; and so she did, shaking her pretty golden mane, waving her poppies high over hand, and singing higher and higher,

32 Thackeray Ritchie, 'Beauty and the Beast', in *Five Old Friends and A Prince*, 93.

33 Thackeray Ritchie, 'Beauty and the Beast', in *Five Old Friends and A Prince*, 94.

like one of the larks that were floating in mid air. The naughty boy was frightened, and firmly believed he had seen a fairy.

‘She was all in white,’ he said afterwards in an aggrieved tone of voice. ‘She’d no hat, or anything, – she bounded six foot into the air, you never saw anything like it.’<sup>34</sup>

There are not many other descriptions of female characters as magical creatures in *Five Old Friends*:<sup>35</sup> Miss Williamson shows their marginal role in the Victorian social system, she insists on their happiness when they can escape, or when they are far from it. Yet, she greatly appreciates their active contribution to the betterment of men’s ‘economical spirit’.<sup>36</sup>

As the following narrative sequence shows, Marthe-Patty, ‘Little Red Riding Hood’, seems to have changed Rémy’s, that is to say ‘the wolf’s’, ‘bad intentions’. The reader will bear in mind that this not the end of the story, yet:

For the first time now a possibility occurred to him [Rémy] of something higher, wiser, holier, than money getting and grasping, in his scheme for the future and for his married life. He scarcely owned it to himself, but now that he had seen his cousin [Patty], he unconsciously realized as if he had not already come with the set purpose of marrying her, he should undoubtedly have lost his heart to this winsome and brilliant little creature. All that evening, as they slid through the water, paddling between the twilight fields, pushing through the beds of water-lilies, sometimes spurling swiftly through the rustling reeds, with the gorgeous banks on either side, and the sunset beyond the hills, and the figures strolling tranquilly along the meadows, De la Louvière only felt himself drifting and drifting into a new wonderful world.<sup>37</sup>

34 Thackeray Ritchie, ‘Cinderella’, in *Five Old Friends and A Prince*, 42.

35 On the connection between old women – Miss Williamson, Mrs ‘H’, Mrs Dormer in ‘The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood’, as well as Lady Jane in ‘Cinderella’ – and their rusty supernatural powers, see Nina Auerbach and U.C. Knoepfelmacher, eds, *Forbidden Journeys*, 13–15.

36 Thackeray Ritchie, ‘Little Red Riding Hood’, in *Five Old Friends and A Prince*, 183.

37 Thackeray Ritchie, ‘Little Red Riding Hood’, in *Five Old Friends and A Prince*, 184.

## A Painful 'Awakening': Thackeray Ritchie's 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood'

A perfect combination of 'compatibility' and 'subversion', then, *Five Old Friends and A Prince* gives its women protagonists a strategic role. They are part of a typically Victorian upper-class context: their ultra-conservative families expect them to follow a precise conduct code, however at a certain moment in the narration they seem determined to mould their men's nature, have a new beginning and be happy. Interestingly, the initial and final phases of this process may be found in the representation of their metaphorical 'sleep', or 'passivity', and of their 'awakening'.

It may be for this reason that 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood' was the opening tale in *Five Old Friends and A Prince*. It was written in 1866, and it was meant not only to modernize Charles Perrault's original version of the text, but also to offer new elements of reflection on the social contradictions and on women's condition at the time. Despite its highly traditional external features, Thackeray Ritchie's tale goes beyond the psychoanalytical 'analogy of a prepubescent girl's dream';<sup>38</sup> it goes beyond that of 'sexual awakening';<sup>39</sup> and it certainly goes beyond the literary representation of 'perfect femininity, struck by the curse of an evil fairy, [and] finally revived through the kiss of a rescuing prince'.<sup>40</sup> In fact, it provides useful background knowledge for readers to decipher the models of women that she will write on in the rest of the collection; what is more important, it almost pedagogically helps to see the devastating effects that custom and social control had on women's lives as individuals.

38 A psychoanalytical approach to 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood' can be found in Harold Neeman, *Piercing the Magic Veil. Toward a Theory of the Conte* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1999), 150–5.

39 Bruno Bettelheim's illuminating section on the tale is in *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Random House, 2010), 225–34.

40 See Emma Piccioli, Pier Luigi Rossi, and Antonio Alberto Salemi, eds, *Writing in Psychoanalysis* (Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press, 1996), 155.



However chronologically and ideologically distant from the 1866 version of 'Sleeping Beauty in the Wood', Hélène Cixous's passage from *The Newly Born Woman* (1975)<sup>41</sup> represents this heavy burden, and clarifies the compromise that an author like Thackeray Ritchie was obliged to find in order to carry out her 'mild' revolution:

*Once upon a time ...*

One cannot yet say of the following history 'it's just a story'. It's a tale still true today. Most women who have wakened remember having slept, *having been put to sleep*.

*Once upon a time ... once and once again.*

Beauties slept in their woods, waiting for princes to wake them up. In their beds, in their glass coffins, in their childhood forests like dead women. Beautiful but passive, hence desirable: all mystery emanates from them. [...]

She sleeps, she is intact, eternal, absolutely powerless. He has no doubt that she has been waiting for him forever.

The secret of her beauty, kept for him: she has the perfection of something finished. Or not begun. However, she is breathing. Just enough life – and not too much. Then he will kiss her. So that when she opens her eyes she will see only *him*; him in place of everything, all-him.<sup>42</sup>

The choice of the French theorist of *écriture féminine* to evoke the image of '[beauties]' childhood forests', and to mention both 'passive, hence desirable [women]' and 'dead women' can be adapted to Thackeray Ritchie's protagonist, Cecilia Lulworth, and to the tale's setting. The first-person narrator, Miss Williamson, describes her 'existence' as 'unutterably dull, commonplace, respectable, stunted, ugly, and useless' in one of her first narrative sequences; as for Lulworth Hall, the place where Cecilia was born and lived most of her life, she underlines the fact that it was 'sad, silent, solitary', and that '[its] great dark park' was 'bounded by limestone walls, with iron gates here and there'.<sup>43</sup> Even more details about the claustrophobic

41 Our reference edition of *La Jeune Née*, first published in 1975 by Union Générale d'Éditions, Paris, is Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*. Introduction by Sandra M. Gilbert (London: Tauris & Co., 1996).

42 Cixous and Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, 65–6.

43 Thackeray Ritchie, 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood', in *Five Old Friends and A Prince*, 4.

atmosphere which will facilitate the young woman's metaphorical 'sleep' can be found in the passage below:

She was surrounded by hideous moreen, oil cloth, punctuality, narrow-mindedness, horsehair and mahogany. Loud bells rang at intervals, regular, monotonous. Surly but devoted attendants waited upon her. She was rather alone; her mother did not think it right that a girl in Cecilia's position should 'race' about the grounds unattended; as for going outside the walls, it was not to be thought of.<sup>44</sup>

A unique narrator in the Victorian literary tradition, Miss Williamson is a middle-aged single woman sharing her life and experience with Mrs H., and will always overtly express her own opinions,<sup>45</sup> especially on social conventions. In particular, her long chain of nouns and adjectives may be seen not only as a perfect stylistic strategy, but also as a tool to create a semantic crescendo of tension, and reinforce her critique of the standardized image that girls needed to conform to. Like most of the other women protagonists in *Five Old Friends and A Prince*, Cecilia is 'alone', 'waited upon by devoted attendants' only, and is not even allowed 'a fire to dress herself by', or to 'go outside the walls' of Lulworth Hall.<sup>46</sup>

Considered as a form of protection of a girl's reputation, however, isolation is the symbol of the Victorian educational principles, and is considered necessary to prepare for domestic life.<sup>47</sup> Again, Miss Williamson is strongly against it:

A great many people think there is nothing in the world so good for children as scoldings, whippings, dark cupboards, and dry bread and water [...]; and a great

44 Thackeray Ritchie, 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood', 4–5.

45 Thackeray Ritchie's choice of an unmarried elderly woman as narrator can be considered 'subversive': 'Although Ritchie's stories end with marriage, it is significant that her narrator should be a single woman. [...] Her aged youthfulness makes her perfectly suited as a purveyor of the old but ever-fresh tales that she merely needs to replant.' Auerbach and Knoepfelmacher, *Forbidden Journeys*, 15.

46 Thackeray Ritchie, 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood', 5, 11.

47 For further information on Victorian pedagogical principles for girls, see Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 15–26.

many people think that for grown-up young people the silence, the chillness, the monotony, and sadness of their own fading twilight days is all that is required. Mrs Lulworth and Maria Bowley her companion, Cecilia's late governess, were quite of this opinion. They themselves, when they were little girls, had been slapped, snubbed, locked up in closet, thrust into bed at all sorts of hours, flattened out on backboards, set on high stools to play the piano for days together, made to hem frills five or six weeks long, and to learn immense pieces of poetry, so that they had to stop at home all the afternoon [...]. [Y]et, they determined to bring up Cecilia as they had been brought up, and sincerely thought they could not do better.<sup>48</sup>

She will dedicate more narrative sequences to Mrs Lulworth's decision to make Cecilia a disciplined child,<sup>49</sup> but she will not go back to this particular issue in the following tales. In 'Beauty and the Beast,' she briefly introduces Belinda's character saying that she 'had only lately come from school,' and that she 'did not value those splendours and properties so highly as her sisters did';<sup>50</sup> in 'Cinderella,' the only information on Ella's past is that she 'had kept her father's house [...] since she was twelve years old';<sup>51</sup> as for 'Little Red Riding Hood,' she posits that Mrs Maynard 'used to devise pretty, fanciful dresses for her Patty [...], and watch over her and pray for her from morning to night'.<sup>52</sup> The reader may understand that Thackeray Ritchie's first tale had to be unique at this level: the details about Cecilia's strict education were meant to promote sustainable change, and to show that, in Cixous's words, Cecilia '*had been put to sleep*'. That would also more easily explain why female agency in *Five Old Friends and A Prince* is

48 Thackeray Ritchie, 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood,' 6.

49 An extract from a letter that Mrs Lulworth wrote to Maria Bowley, the governess, is worth quoting: 'We are now permanently established in our aunt's house. I hear you are in want of a situation; pray come and superintend the education of my only child Cecilia (she is named after her godmother, Mrs Dormer). She is now nearly three years old, and I feel that she begins to require some discipline.' Thackeray Ritchie, 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood,' 7.

50 Miss Williamson first introduces Patty's character in chapter II of 'Beauty and the Beast,' 88.

51 Thackeray Ritchie, 'Cinderella,' 40.

52 Thackeray Ritchie, 'Little Red Riding Hood,' 174–5.

limited to the protagonists' ability to better their men's nature and start a new life with them.

Miss Williamson's long introduction, however, finishes when Cecilia is said to be twenty-five. She is 'a woman now', but 'like a child in experience, in ignorance, in placidity';<sup>53</sup> furthermore, 'she [is] rather too stout for her age; she ha[s] not much expression in her face. And no wonder.' As the following narrative sequence reads:

There was not much to be expressive about in her poor little stinted life. She could not go into raptures over the mahogany sideboard, the camphine lamp in the drawing-room, the four-post beds indoors, the laurel-bushes without, the Moorish temple with yellow glass windows, or the wigwam summer-house, which were alternate boundaries of her daily walks.<sup>54</sup>

Again, the first-person narrator insists on Cecilia's dull, monotonous life. Nothing had changed in those years: 'she had not known another life', and 'it seemed to her only natural that all days should be alike.'<sup>55</sup> Surprisingly, however, on one 'especial night', her ideas about the future become unequivocally clear:

'Five-and-twenty,' said [her aunt, Old Mrs Dormer,] quite crossly. 'I had no idea time went so fast. She ought to have married long ago; that is, if she means to marry at all.'

'I don't intend to marry,' said Cecilia, peeling an orange, and quite unmoved, and she slowly curled the rind of her orange in the air. 'I think people are very stupid to marry. Look at poor Jane Simmonds – her husband beats her; Jones saw her.'<sup>56</sup>

Cecilia's determination not to marry – thus, not to become a man's victim – may be seen as a clear form of criticism against the main institution in a patriarchal society. The author of *Bleak Houses: Marital Violence in Victorian Fiction*, Lisa Anne Surridge, confirms that, in mid-nineteenth century, 'the number of offenses had increased to such an extent as to become a disgrace

53 Thackeray Ritchie, 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood', 7–8.

54 Thackeray Ritchie, 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood', 10–11.

55 Thackeray Ritchie, 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood', 8.

56 Thackeray Ritchie, 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood', 14.

to [England]’;<sup>57</sup> and that this had led to the re-discussion of gender roles and women’s place in marriage. Thackeray Ritchie may have known this tragic phenomenon, and may have purposely returned to this topic in ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ too: going beyond the socio-economic significance that marriage had for the Capuchon and De la Louvière families, Mr and Mrs Maynard cannot even think that their only child, Patty, will marry soon,<sup>58</sup> and almost envisage a future for her as a happy single woman.

In this collection, then, compatibility and subversion are closely related to the protagonists’ future perspectives as adult women. Deeply concerned about Cecilia’s condition – ‘she had nor friends nor lovers’<sup>59</sup> – Mrs Dormer, her old great-aunt, calls over Frank Lulworth, a member of the family and a lawyer. This new event immediately changes the structure of ‘The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood’ both at a narrative and a linguistic level. In fact, the number of dialogical sequences increases,<sup>60</sup> and the lexical repetition of the word ‘sleep’ is semantically connected with ‘silence’, ‘black shadows’, and ‘death.’<sup>61</sup> Now Lulworth Hall too, for instance, is perceived as a ‘vault’,

57 Lisa Anne Surridge, *Bleak Houses: Marital Violence in Victorian Fiction* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005). See page 103 in particular.

58 ‘The child grew up as the years went by, but if Marthe made plans for her, they were distant ones, and to the mother as impossible still as when Patty had been a little baby tumbling in the cradle. [...] What hero there was in the big world worthy of her darling, Mrs Maynard did not know’. Thackeray Ritchie, ‘Little Red Riding Hood’, 175.

59 Thackeray Ritchie, ‘The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood’, 9.

60 Thackeray Ritchie, ‘The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood’, 20–5.

61 There are very few nouns, adjectives, and verbs connected with the semantic field of ‘sleep’ in ‘The Sleeping Beauty’: ‘sleep’ and ‘half-asleep’ only occur once in the text; ‘sleepy’ and ‘dozing’ twice. They are generally used in relation to Old Mrs Dormer, Mr Lulworth, Cecilia, the under-butler, the ‘fat cook’, and they can be found in the second part of the text. Mrs Dormer ‘never came down before dinner. All day long she stayed up in her room, dozing and trying remedies, and occasionally looking over old journals and letters until it was time to come downstairs. She [...] was used to the life – she was sixty when they came to her, she was long past eighty now – the last twenty years had been like a long sleep, with the dream of what had happened when she was alive and in the world continually passing before her’. Thackeray Ritchie ‘The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood’, 12.

a 'catacomb', an 'ugly place'.<sup>62</sup> And Miss Williamson maintains that the young man 'had never seen anything so dismal, so silent, so neglected'.<sup>63</sup>

Frank's arrival at Darlincote, the surrounding area, is a clear textual reference to Perrault's version of the text. A key scene here, it only parallels the image of little Cecilia using 'an old spinning-wheel and distaff, and [pricking] her fingers' in Part I:<sup>64</sup>

He passed by black and sombre avenues leading to mouldy temples, to crumbling summer-houses; he saw what had once been a flower garden, now all run to seed – wild, struggling, forlorn; a broken-down bench, a heap of hurdles lying on the ground, a field-mouse darting across the road, a desolate autumn sun shining upon all this mouldering ornament and confusion.<sup>65</sup>

It is in such a sad and gloomy atmosphere that Frank and Cecilia meet for the first time. Again, the signs of the young woman's paralysis are all described in full: she is 'impassive', she 'only turns her great sleepy astonished eyes', and 'stands still' like 'one of those beautiful wax-dolls'.<sup>66</sup> Yet, she bursts into tears when the young man salutes her: Miss Williamson draws the reader's attention to old Mrs Dormer's sheer disappointment, on Mrs Lulworth's reproach, as well as on Cecilia's horror and 'bewilderment'. For the first time, though, she, as a narrator, feels free to use the typical language of fairy tales, and refers to Mrs Dormer as the 'poor old fairy' in the tale and to the young man as 'the prince'. Finally, she is explicit about the fact that 'the princess had awakened, but in tears'.<sup>67</sup>

62 It is young Frank Lulworth, 'the prince', who perceives Lulworth Hall almost as a 'catacomb', the equivalent of a 'coffin'. 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood', 20.

63 Thackeray Ritchie, 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood', 17–18.

64 Thackeray Ritchie, 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood', 8.

65 Thackeray Ritchie, 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood', 18.

66 Thackeray Ritchie, 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood', 21–2.

67 The change in Miss Williamson's language is worth considering. The reader may want to consider the following narrative sequence: 'The poor old fairy was all puzzled and bewildered: her arts were powerless in this emergency. The princess had awaked, but in tears. Although he said he was going, the prince still stood by distressed and concerned, feeling horribly guilty'. Thackeray Ritchie, 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood', 23.

Cecilia's fear of her mother's terrible reaction is pivotal: her 'awakening' process had been traumatic and painful because she had always felt protected at Lulworth Hall, and was not ready for change.<sup>68</sup> Evidence of the fact that she was quite contented with her past life, and that she utterly refused Frank, is that even the fatal kiss in Perrault's version had been replaced by an unwanted (and chaste) salutation embrace.

But 'fairy tales are never very long': Cecilia feels that she is expected to remember the rules of her 'admirable upbringing', and to behave accordingly.<sup>69</sup> Suddenly, she changes direction, and re-considers her 'prince':

'I thought it was I who had been rude and unkind', Cecilia falteringly said. 'How good of you not to be vexed'. 'Cecilia', said Mrs Lulworth and Miss Bowley both at once, in different tones of warning; but the princess was awake now, and her simplicity and beauty touched the young prince, who never, I think, really intended to go, even when he took up his hat. Fairy tales are never very long, and this one ought to come to an end.

Certainly the story would not have been worth the telling if they had not been married soon after, and lived happily all the rest of their lives.<sup>70</sup>

A Victorian princess who had been '*put to sleep*' by the members of her family, Cecilia is now fully 'awake', and ready to comply with her mother's orders. It may be for this reason that this version of the tale should be seen as a truthful picture of young women's painful transition to adulthood in Victorian England.

68 To know more about Cecilia's perception of herself and of her life when she was a twenty-five-year-old woman: 'She was nor happy nor unhappy. She could read, but she never cared to open a book. She was quite contented; for she thought Lulworth Hall the finest place, and its inmates the most important people in the world'. Thackeray Ritchie, 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood', 9.

69 Apart from Cecilia's family's pressure on her, the reader will consider that she too strongly believed in their teachings. See, for instance, the following passage: 'She never thought of anything but the uttermost commonplaces and platitudes. She considered that being respectable and decorous, and a little pompous and overbearing, was the duty of every well-brought-up lady and gentleman.' Thackeray Ritchie, 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood', 9.

70 Thackeray Ritchie, 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood', 25.

Despite Thackeray Ritchie's innovative ideas on custom, on the limitations it imposed on women's education, as well as on marriage, the final conclusion that her narrator envisages is more than reassuring for the common reader. The image of Cecilia, 'bright' and 'merry' 'in her own home', is like a 'fairy transformation', and an unequivocal form of pacification of all conflicts.

A fundamental basis of the representation of the other *she*-protagonists in *Five Old Friends and A Prince* (Belle, Patty, and Ella in particular), 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood' gently forces the reader to realize that the only possibilities for women to express themselves were either new forms of escapism or of limited power over men's nature.

'Good fairies' and perfect 'angels in the house' for Thackeray Ritchie were the only feminine models that needed to be realistically represented. More importantly, at a metaphorical level, they were the only possible masks that she could choose to carry out her 'mild' revolution.

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STEFANIA ARCARA

## Sleep and Liberation: The Opiate World of Elizabeth Siddal

But bring me poppies brimmed with sleepy death ...

— CHRISTINA ROSSETTI, 'Looking Forward'

And then there were all those poems about women, written by men: it seemed to be a given that men wrote poems and women frequently inhabited them. These women were almost always beautiful, but threatened with the loss of beauty, the loss of youth – the fate worse than death. Or, they were beautiful and died young.

— ADRIENNE RICH, 'When We Dead Awaken'

The idealized conception of womanhood around which Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics revolved was part of the gender ideology that characterized Victorian society at large. As G.P. Landow, among others, has argued, the Pre-Raphaelite artists' conception of woman is 'particularly androcentric'.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes she is an active figure, the devourer of men who anticipates the decadent *femme fatale* – such as the Rossettian *Lady Lilith* or *Astarte Syriaca* – but more often she is a passive figure, innocent, melancholic and contemplative. This Pre-Raphaelite icon of femininity, as has been noted, waits for her lover to awake her, to rescue her or even to create her.<sup>2</sup> The representation of gender relations in Pre-Raphaelite art thus tends to focus on a single theme, more or less eroticized, and always set in mythical, fabulous or medieval surroundings:

1 George P. Landow, 'Estetismo e decadentismo', trans. C. Pomarè, in Franco Marengo, ed., *Storia della civiltà letteraria inglese* (Turin: Utet, 1996), vol. 2, 799–825, 812.

2 Landow, 'Estetismo e decadentismo', 812.

a defenceless damsel waits for a knight to act. This topos of Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics is articulated in several mythical variations: Pygmalion, Perseus, Cupid and Psyche, St George and the dragon. The Sleeping Beauty myth is another important variation of this theme, notably explored by Burne-Jones in his series *The Briar Rose* and, as we shall see, also employed by Rossetti in a more implicit manner in a number of portraits of Elizabeth Siddal. A peculiarity of the Sleeping Beauty myth in Siddal's case is that, together with her Shakespearean and Dantesque associations, it spilled from art to life, was combined with the biographical data of her illness and laudanum addiction, and became attached to the woman herself, so that she has become somehow a mythical figure, the emblem of ultra-romantic, languishing femininity.

The aim of this essay is twofold: it will attempt to deconstruct the stereotypical image of Siddal as a Pre-Raphaelite Sleeping Beauty produced by the Rossettian aesthetic ideology and perpetuated to this day in high and popular culture; it will also offer a reading of Elizabeth Siddal as a poet and artist, taking into account her strategies of self-representation and exploring the relationship between gender, artistic creativity and the themes of sleep and death in Victorian culture.

As has been noted, Siddal is 'known almost exclusively through the images and descriptions others made of her'.<sup>3</sup> Rather than to her name, her fame is linked to her features, identified, in the minds of generations of Britons, with those of the Shakespearean Ophelia in the famous Millais painting for which she posed: the image of Ophelia drowning in a stream among wild flowers has become one of the epitomes of Victorian visual culture, widely reproduced and admired by crowds of visitors at Tate Britain. Siddal's name is also inextricably associated with that of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who immortalized her in countless portraits, many of which show her reclining or sleeping. While her features have been constantly exhibited and her dead body even disinterred,<sup>4</sup> the artistic personality of Elizabeth

3 Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 168.

4 Seven years after Siddal's death, Dante Gabriel Rossetti secretly organized the exhumation of her body, which took place on 5 October 1869 at Highgate Cemetery, in order to retrieve the manuscripts of his unpublished poems that he had buried in

Siddal has long remained buried, overshadowed by her own fame as the muse and lover of the Victorian Dante.

Since the time of her death in 1862, historians, biographers and art critics have constructed a romanticized image of Siddal as the muse inspiring the masculine creative genius and have fabricated the legend of a weak, victimized woman who died young with a broken heart. The predominant narrative regarding Siddal still identifies her with the epitome of passive and angelic Pre-Raphaelite beauty, and with the characters she modelled for, Ophelia and Beatrice, elusive objects of male love doomed to an early death. However, in the last decades of the twentieth century, since the ground-breaking 'Woman as Sign in Pre-Raphaelite literature' by Pollock and Cherry (1984), a wealth of critical studies have rediscovered the pictorial and poetic production of Elizabeth Siddal:<sup>5</sup> she produced over a hundred pictorial works, was sponsored by Ruskin and was the only woman participant in the 1857 Pre-Raphaelite Exhibition in London. Her verses, though never published in her lifetime, were admired by Christina Rossetti, Swinburne and Wilde, and are now included in anthologies of Victorian poetry.<sup>6</sup> In recent art historiography Siddal has been 'recontextualized as part of a larger – though amorphous – group of Pre-Raphaelite women artists and as a distinctive and significant figure among the Pre-Raphaelites themselves'.<sup>7</sup>

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his wife's coffin as a romantic gesture. See, among others, Jan Marsh, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Painter and Poet* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999), 374–9.

- 5 Griselda Pollock and Deborah Cherry, 'Woman as Sign in Pre-Raphaelite Literature: the Representation of Elizabeth Siddall', in G. Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and the Histories of Art* (London-New York: Routledge, 1988), 91–114. Originally published in *Art History* 2 (1984), 206–27. The biographer and art historian Jan Marsh has published widely on Siddal and in 1991 she organized an exhibition of her works at Ruskin Art Gallery in Sheffield.
- 6 Oscar Wilde found Siddal 'fascinating' and especially appreciated her poem 'A Year and a Day' which he read in prison. See Wilde's letter to Robert Ross, 6 April 1897, in Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis, eds, *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), 791.
- 7 Michaela Giebelhausen and Tim Barringer, eds, *Writing the Pre-Raphaelites: Text, Context, Subtext* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 8.

## The Sleeping Muse

With few exceptions, throughout the twentieth century the scarce evidence about Siddal's life has been selected and arranged by biographers, art historians and even novelists, according to the narrative conventions of a fairy tale, with a tragic ending: the story of the ill-fated love between a beautiful, vulnerable maid and her prince-artist, the *poète maudit* Dante Gabriel. The romantic sensationalism associated with her persona and with the circumstances of her demise originated with the first biography devoted to her by Violet Hunt, *The Wife of Rossetti: her Life and Death* (1932) and can be found, substantially unchanged, in Lucinda Hawksley's *Lizzie Siddal: the Tragedy of a Victorian Supermodel* (2004).

According to the legend, retold in countless publications and websites, the young and beautiful 'Lizzie', born to a humble family, was 'discovered' by the Pre-Raphaelite brothers when she worked in a milliner's shop in London, soon becoming Rossetti's model, then his lover and pupil. She fell in love with him, but for about nine years he procrastinated their marriage, while her health deteriorated because of a mysterious illness that was treated with laudanum. Finally, and reluctantly, Dante married her in 1860 but two years after the marriage – so the legend recites – she took her own life, exasperated by Rossetti's prolonged infidelities. Despite the lack of evidence that the laudanum overdose that caused her death at thirty-two was intentional, and despite the official coroner's verdict of 'accidental death', the romantic myth of Siddal's Ophelia-like suicide for love started to proliferate and is still uncritically reiterated today.<sup>8</sup> Stereotypical readings of her persona have been popularized in twentieth-century film, fiction and

8 Even in academic publications her suicide is taken for granted: for instance, the editors of the *Victorian Prose and Poetry* volume in the *Oxford Anthology of English Literature* series, L. Trilling and H. Bloom, in their introduction to the section devoted to D.G. Rossetti, confidently write about 'the beautiful Elizabeth Siddal': 'The marriage was unhappy and Mrs. Rossetti killed herself after less than two years'. Lionel Trilling and Harold Bloom, eds, *Victorian Prose and Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 616.

theatre, and are constantly circulated in digital culture.<sup>9</sup> References to her 'suicide' are passed on as a certain fact, and used to redefine her own life as a tale of Eros and Thanatos: the pictorial representations by Rossetti that portray her as a feeble, languid figure, often sleeping or day-dreaming, appear to serve as further evidence of her destiny as silent object of desire, beloved and gazed upon while she is on the verge of fainting or dying.

Rossetti produced such a large number of portraits of Siddal that his friend Ford Madox Brown commented: 'it is like a monomania with him'.<sup>10</sup> The walls of his studio in Blackfriars were literally covered with portraits of Siddal: as Christina Rossetti noted in her sonnet 'In an Artist's Studio', 'One face looks out from all his canvases'. Well before feminist criticism, Christina Rossetti pointed out the narcissistic and quasi-vampiric obsession of the male artist for his muse ('He feeds upon her face by day and night'), as well as the painter's artificial idealization of the woman ('Not as she is but as she fills his dream').<sup>11</sup>

Many of these portraits may be read as Rossettian elaborations of the Sleeping Beauty myth, where the female figure appears to be constantly in a state of lassitude, sleep or trance. Elizabeth Siddal is depicted in a reclining

- 9 See the film directed by Ken Russell, *Dante's Inferno* (BBC 1967) and the more recent BBC television drama *Desperate Romantics* (BBC 2009). A number of British and American novels inspired by Siddal's life, love story, and disinterment have been published throughout the twentieth century. See Stefania Arcara, 'Elizabeth Siddal poetessa preraffaellita', in Stefania Arcara, ed., *Elizabeth Siddal, Di rivi e gigli. Poesie e lettere* (Bari: Palomar, 2009), 7–47, 26. The story of Siddal's life has also been adapted for the theatre by Canadian playwright Kim Morrissey in *Clever as Paint*, performed in London in 1995, and for BBC Radio 2 by Emlyn Harris in one episode of *The Sexton's Tales* (1995). A Gothic version of Siddal as eternal Sleeping Beauty enjoys increasing popularity on the internet: in the page devoted to her in the specialized website *Find A Grave* (<<http://www.findagrave.com>>), Siddal is defined as 'Folk Figure' and the cause of death is given as 'suicide'. Visitors can leave a message and a virtual candle on her page. See Arcara, 'Elizabeth Siddal poetessa preraffaellita', 27.
- 10 Quoted in Helen Rossetti Angeli, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Friends and Enemies* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1949), 189.
- 11 Christina Rossetti, 'In an Artist's Studio', in R.W. Crump, ed., *The Complete Poems* (London: Penguin, 2005), 796.

position, resting or sleeping in an armchair, her eyes closed or downcast, always averted from the viewer: the images evoke an atmosphere of apathy, dreaminess, ennui (see Figures 2 and 3).<sup>12</sup>



Figure 2: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Elizabeth Siddal in a Chair*, 1854–1862, pen and sepia © The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

- 12 There exist nearly thirty portraits of this kind, depicting Siddal in passive poses, with her eyes closed or downcast, often reclining on an armchair: in some of them she seems clearly asleep, while in others she appears to be musing or resting languidly.





Figure 3: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Elizabeth Siddal Seated in a Chair*, c.1855, pencil, Private collection – Photo © Christie's Images/Bridgeman Images.

The majority of these 'Sleeping Beauty portraits' are pencil or pen and ink drawings, apparently produced in the domesticity of home (sometimes a piece of furniture or a book is visible, and the model wears everyday clothes). However, even more than the sensual celebration of female beauty in the famous Rossettian oil portraits, these drawings of a sleeping Siddal reveal the supremacy of the artist's/lover's objectifying gaze: the model/beloved is captured in the passivity of sleep, defenceless and unaware of being observed. She becomes a reified being, immobilized in a state of complete submission to the laws of pictorial representation, an enigmatic beauty devoid of subjectivity because she is *unconscious*. The female figure

appears temporarily incapacitated by sleep, therefore quintessentially vulnerable – a state which, in a typically Rossettian manner, elicits the male viewer's voyeuristic pleasure. The sleep element thus exposes the mechanisms of representation of the gender relations (male artist/female muse) that are at work in Victorian art.

The insistence on sleep and passivity, on virginal and vulnerable beauty in Rossetti's portraits of Siddal must be placed in the context of gender relations in the Victorian art world. As is well known, Rossetti and his fellow artists went hunting for young models among working-class girls in London streets and theatres. As in the Ovidian myth of Pygmalion, the sculptor who loves the beautiful statue he has carved, in real life some Pre-Raphaelite artists married their models:<sup>13</sup> these women, chosen for their youth and stunning beauty ('stunners'), would be 'redeemed' from their lower class origins and from the morally ambiguous role as models and transformed into respectable, refined and deferential wives, serviceable muses sustaining the artists' creative powers.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Rossetti's obsessive images of Siddal as a delicate Sleeping Beauty may be read as part of a social and iconographic process of reconfiguration of femininity according to the painter's own ideal and to Victorian gender ideology.

Siddal's opium addiction, with its consequent state of sleepiness, also needs to be taken into account as the material basis on which the Sleeping Beauty association was constructed and perpetuated. A reference to Siddal's familiarity with opium-induced trances may be discerned in a detail of *Beata Beatrix* (see Figure 4), Rossetti's post-mortem glorification of his wife, 'perhaps the most famous icon of Siddal as muse who blesses by inspiring'.<sup>15</sup> The painting evokes a transcendental kind of sensuality, where the central figure of the woman is represented – to use the painter's own term – in a

13 See William Morris and Jane Burden, Ford Madox Brown and Emma Hill.

14 On the 'programme of drastic re-education' to which models were subjected in order to become respectable wives, see Pollock and Cherry, 'Woman as Sign in Pre-Raphaelite Literature', 105.

15 Beverly Taylor, 'Beatrix/Creatrix: Elizabeth Siddal as Muse and Creator', *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 4/Spring (1995), 29–41, 30.

state of *trance*.<sup>16</sup> Siddal/Beatrice is portrayed with her eyes closed at the ecstatic moment in which she is about to ascend to heaven, while a mystical dove lays on her hands a flower of *papaver somniferum*. On an allegorical level, the poppy flower has been variously interpreted as representing death, chastity, peace, the afterlife. But, on a more private level, it may be a coded reference to Siddal's opium addiction and her altered states of consciousness, a reference that cannot have been unintentional, coming from Dante Gabriel who knew her very well and was himself addicted to various substances for most of his life.<sup>17</sup>



Figure 4: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Beata Beatrix*, 1864–1870, oil on canvas, detail of the dove with a poppy flower © Tate Britain.

- 16 'The picture must of course be viewed not as a representation of the incident of the death of Beatrice, but as an ideal of the subject, symbolized by a trance or sudden spiritual transfiguration. Beatrice is rapt visibly into Heaven, seeing as it were through her shut lids'. D.G. Rossetti's letter to William Graham, 11 March 1873, quoted in Virginia Surtees, *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–82). A Catalogue Raisonné* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), vol. 1, 96.
- 17 See Marsh, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*.

As commonly happened in the nineteenth century, Siddal's addiction was a consequence of the therapeutic use of laudanum, a tincture of opium, prescribed by doctors (death by accidental overdose was also very common, and it is probable that this was the case with Siddal). Siddal's illness (which may have been anorexia) remained unidentified: a number of medical diagnoses were made at the time, from an improbable 'curvature of the spine', to 'neurasthenia' and nervous breakdown, which were attributed by doctors to the efforts made by the frail Siddal in her attempts at artistic creation (some doctors even advised her to stop painting).<sup>18</sup> In any case she was cured with laudanum, which at the time was a staple of English therapeutics, readily available at any drug store. It is recorded that Siddal, like many of her contemporaries, especially women,<sup>19</sup> was a regular opium user and that towards the end of her life she became heavily addicted to the substance, as the boundaries between medical and 'recreational' uses became blurred. It is important to bear in mind that Siddal's use of laudanum was socially acceptable:

While strong taboos existed against middle-class women smoking or drinking alcohol in public, medicines containing alcohol, opium and cocaine were regularly prescribed by doctors to women, who took them privately. If women did take these drugs for pleasure, the medical intentions of the drugs could serve as a cover.<sup>20</sup>

On the one hand, Siddal's laudanum addiction resulted in her adopting the typically Victorian feminine role of an 'invalid'. In the eyes of society, her

- 18 Information on Siddal's illness, including medical diagnoses, is recorded by William Michael Rossetti in *Dante Gabriel Rossetti – His Family Letters with a Memoir* (London: Ellis and Elvey, 1895), vol. 2, 177. Considering female intellectual pursuits as pathological in nature was a recurrent practice of medical discourse still at the end of the century, when the fifteen-year-old Virginia Woolf received medical advice concerning the adverse effects of intellectual activity upon her hypersensitive nature. See Louise DeSalvo, '1897: Virginia Woolf at 15', in Jane Marcus, ed., *Virginia Woolf: a Feminist Slant* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 78–108.
- 19 'Women greatly outnumbered men as opium habitués.' Terry M. Parssinen, *Secret Passions, Secret Remedies: Narcotic Drugs in British Society 1820–1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), 48.
- 20 Kristina Aikens, *A Pharmacy of her Own: Victorian Women and the Figure of the Opiate* (Ann Arbor: ProQuest, UMI dissertation publishing, 2008), 32.

languor and delicate health symbolically redeemed her from her humble origins and conferred upon her the social status of a *lady*. On the other hand, epistolary evidence shows that, with her strong personality, Siddal was impatient when she had to submit to the suffocating cares of Rossetti, Ruskin and other solicitous friends. 'I thank you most heartily for your kind concern' – she wrote proudly to Barbara Leigh Smith in May 1854 – 'and would at once decide about going to the Hospital if I thought that the state of my health was bad enough to warrant my entrance into one'.<sup>21</sup> Having refused to be hospitalized, she continued her self-medication with laudanum to the point where she was taking massive doses of the potent opiate.

My suggestion is that altered states of consciousness were a realm of subjectivity that was central in Siddal's life and art. They constituted a potentially liberating space for imaginative experimentation and a temporary channel of expression subtly but radically subverting the conventions of Victorian femininity. As has been argued,

When encountering drugs, femininity moves from its realm of sentimentality and morality and into a space of textual play, curiosity and experimentation, in which passivity and receptiveness can provide an opening for imagination, unconventional behaviour and subjectivity rather than victimization.<sup>22</sup>

This is particularly evident in some of Siddal's verses, where, as will be shown, the passivity of female sleep or trance evades victimization, becoming instead the channel for the poetic articulation of desire. Whether or not some of her poems were written under the effect of laudanum is open to debate – her brother-in-law William Michael Rossetti hinted that this was the case, as her handwriting in some of the original manuscripts may indicate (see Figure 5).<sup>23</sup> But what is most relevant is the use that Siddal, as an artist and poet, makes of the motif of sleep.

21 Quoted in Jan Marsh, *Elizabeth Siddal – Pre-Raphaelite Artist 1829–62* (Sheffield: Ruskin Gallery, 1991), 14.

22 Aikens, *A Pharmacy of her Own*, 5.

23 William Michael Rossetti conjectures that the poem 'Lord May I Come?', whose manuscript shows especially illegible and irregular handwriting, was composed under

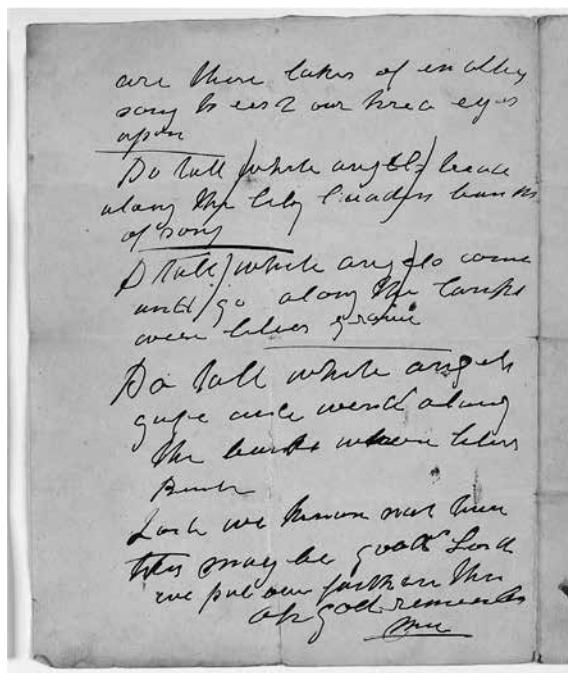


Figure 5: Elizabeth Siddal, Original manuscript of the poem 'Lord May I come?'  
© The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

## Sleep as Liberation

Rossetti's drawings represent Siddal as a Sleeping Beauty, melancholic, passive, resourceless; her biographers perpetuated the myth, adding the ingredient of a self-inflicted death for love. Yet, there is evidence, both direct and indirect, that does not match this constructed image: some of

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the effect of laudanum shortly before Siddal's death. William Michael Rossetti, *Some Reminiscences* (London: Brown, Langham & Co., 1906), vol. 1, 196.

her contemporaries describe Siddal as endowed with a strong personality, spirited, sarcastic and unconventional. Algernon Charles Swinburne, a close friend of hers, called her 'an incomparable lady' and wrote of her 'courage, endurance, wit, humour, heroism';<sup>24</sup> her brother-in-law William Michael Rossetti gives us a glimpse of her independent spirit when he mentions her 'decided inclination to order her mode of life according to her own liking, whether conformable or not to the view of the British matron.'<sup>25</sup> Siddal was an acute observer and an ironic letter-writer, as testified by a playful narrative piece she wrote from Nizza in 1853, one of her very few surviving letters to Dante Gabriel.<sup>26</sup> Above all, what the stereotypical images of Siddal as Pre-Raphaelite Sleeping Beauty tend to obscure is the fact that she devoted a good part of her life to the study of painting and drawing, and worked to affirm herself as an artist in the male-dominated Victorian art world.

She was also interested in combining the visual and the textual, as was typical of Pre-Raphaelitism, and experimented with poetry. Her verses were appreciated by her sister-in-law Christina Rossetti, already a successful poet, who, after Siddal's death, conceived the idea of publishing them together with her own in a single volume. The project, however, was never realized for a series of reasons relating to Dante Gabriel's indifference:<sup>27</sup> they were eventually published by William Michael Rossetti between 1895 and 1906,

24 Algernon Charles Swinburne, letter to William Minto, December 1892, in Cecil Y. Lang, ed., *The Yale Edition of the Swinburne Letters* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1959), vol. 6, 49–50.

25 William Michael Rossetti, 'Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal', *The Burlington Magazine* 1/3 (1903), 273–95, 273–4.

26 Elizabeth Siddal, letter to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, December 1855, quoted in William Michael Rossetti, ed., *Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism. Papers 1854 to 1862* (London: George Allen, 1899), 110–13.

27 Three years after Siddal's death, in February 1865, Christina Rossetti wrote to her brother about the possibility of including 'some of dear Lizzie's verses' in a volume she was preparing, which would eventually come out as *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* (1866); from the epistolary exchange between brother and sister it appears that Dante Gabriel declined Christina's offer of a joint publication because he desired instead to publish Siddal's poems together with his own verses. However, several years later, when in 1870 his next volume of poetry appeared, it contained

and for the first time collectively only in 1978.<sup>28</sup> It could be argued that the co-publication with her famous sister-in-law would have made some difference in the future appreciation of her verses, perhaps the difference between neglect and canonization in the history of Victorian women's poetry. Although as early as 1904 the critic Zaira Vitale, one of the rare appreciative voices, enthusiastically called for Siddal's inclusion in the 'history of English poetry',<sup>29</sup> for most of the twentieth century Siddal's critical fortune as a poet was quite unremarkable: for a long time her texts were read with morbid curiosity by biographers in search of clues for their Victorian melodrama, as documents that testified, for instance, her husband's infidelities or her suicidal tendencies. Thus Siddal's poems have often been viewed as the scribbling of a depressed woman, the solitary expression of private sorrow. However, as Jan Marsh and other Siddal scholars have demonstrated, 'like the drawings and paintings, they are self-conscious works of art, not raw autobiographical writings'.<sup>30</sup> Her brother-in-law William Michael Rossetti, commenting on the state of the manuscripts, sheds light on the process of composition that indicates a clear artistic intention:

She used to take a great deal of pains, and I fancy was seldom or never satisfied with her productions. One can find dozen scribbles of the same stanza here and there modified and corrected.<sup>31</sup>

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the poems he had purposely disinterred from Lizzie's grave, but not hers. See Arcara, 'Elizabeth Siddal poetessa preraffaellita', 31–2.

28 See Roger C. Lewis and Mark Samuels Lasner, eds, *Poems and Drawings of Elizabeth Siddal* (Wolfville, Nova Scotia: Wombat Press, 1978). The poems were also collectively published in Marsh, *Elizabeth Siddal*, 30–6. A critical edition of Siddal's poems and letters, based on the manuscripts kept at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, and with Italian translation on the facing pages, is Arcara, ed., Elizabeth Siddal, *Di rivi e gigli*.

29 Zaira Vitale, 'Eleonora Siddal Rossetti', *Emporium* 19 (1904), 430–47, 433.

30 Jan Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal* (London: Quartet, 1989), 198. See also Taylor, 'Beatrix/Creatrix'; Constance W. Hassett, 'Elizabeth Siddal's Poetry: A Problem and Some Suggestions', *Victorian Poetry* 35/2, (1997), 443–70; Arcara, 'Elizabeth Siddal poetessa preraffaellita'.

31 W.M. Rossetti, ed., *Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism*, 150.



Despite the evident literary nature of Siddal's verses, her poetic production has been fiercely attacked and even derided by Rossettian scholars, eager to demonstrate that 'she was as the moon to his sun, merely reflecting his light', as one of the most benevolent critics put it as late as 1973.<sup>32</sup> The critics' dismissal of the literary qualities and of the manifest authorial awareness of her verses is part of the same process of construction of Siddal as a cipher of Rossetti's art and pathetic heroine of a tragic fairy tale, roles incompatible with a woman's artistic personality.

Partly because of the limited circulation of her texts, and partly because of the persistent tendency to read them as biographical documents, Siddal's verses received their due critical appreciation only in the 1990s, when her work was finally read within the Victorian literary context and her role as Rossetti's muse de-romanticized.<sup>33</sup> In her analysis of Siddal's pictorial works, Beverly Taylor illustrated the way in which, as an artist, Siddal 'often subtly critiqued prevailing gender expectations and power relations', while Constance W. Hassett pointed out that 'what has passed as a strictly autobiographical element in Siddal's work is, in fact, a typically Victorian tonality'.<sup>34</sup>

The late twentieth-century (re)discovery of Siddal's pictorial and poetic production has contributed to throw light on her personality, long obscured by representations made by others: what emerges is the strife of a young artist, coming from an unprivileged social background, who was determined to paint and write in the male dominated Pre-Raphaelite circle. Some of

32 John Gere, 'Introduction', in *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Painter and Poet* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1973), 14, quoted in Taylor, 'Beatrix/Creatrix', 29. Perhaps the most acrimonious comment on Siddal's poems was that of D.G. Rossetti's biographer, Oswald Doughty, who dismissed them as 'little love-sick verses, all pathos and self-pity'. Oswald Doughty, *A Victorian Romantic: Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 129.

33 Two important articles on Siddal's art and poetry appeared in the 1990s: Taylor, 'Beatrix/Creatrix' and Hassett, 'Elizabeth Siddal's Poetry'. Siddal's poems had been appreciated in the early twentieth century by two pioneering Italian critics: Vitale, 'Eleonora Siddal Rossetti', and Alice Galimberti, 'Elisabetta Siddal ispiratrice e poetessa', *Rivista d'Italia* (1925), 336–49.

34 Taylor, 'Beatrix/Creatrix', 34; Hassett, 'Elizabeth Siddal's Poetry', 446.

her verses – most notably the poem ‘The Lust of the Eyes’ – deconstruct with amazing lucidity and bitter irony the relationship between model and painter, to the extent of denouncing the objectifying gaze of the male artist: from these verses it is clear that Siddal was very aware that, as a woman in an artistic environment, she had to confront the centrality of an idealized or eroticized femininity, the eternal object of enjoyment in androcentric aesthetics.

The only self-portrait she painted, an oil from 1853–4, offers a representation of herself that is clearly discordant with the Rossettian images known to the public: her open eyes gaze directly at the viewer with a look of stern reserve and no trace of seduction. She does not appear as beautiful as in her husband’s portrayals of her, but very alert and in control, the antithesis of a Victorian Sleeping Beauty. Significantly, William Michael Rossetti commented on the painting that it was ‘her very self’.<sup>35</sup>

In Siddal’s pictorial works, mostly devoted to typical Pre-Raphaelite motifs, there is one occurrence of the theme of sleep (see Figure 6). It is a pen-and-ink sketch, which can be taken as doodling, but is striking for its intensity. Posthumously titled *A Woman and a Spectre*, it shows a woman, presumably the artist herself, lying down sleeping while a monstrous ghost-like figure rises from her body. The spectre has long hair, but it shows no hint of beauty, on the contrary, it looks haggard, with wide-open eyes staring at the viewer as if to communicate despair or even anger – with arms raised and hands tearing at its hair. In psychoanalytic terms the spectre may be easily interpreted as the personification of Siddal’s unconscious, but it would be even more interesting to ask whether the figure represents Siddal’s *liberated* self, escaping from the constraints of her life, perhaps during an opium-induced sleep – the rebellious female self that was normally trapped in a Victorian Sleeping Beauty. As has been observed, ‘the image suggests

35 ‘The most competent piece of execution that she ever produced, an excellent and graceful likeliness, and truly good: it is her very self’. W.M. Rossetti, ‘Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal’, 277.

that a demure Victorian woman, in an unguarded state, may release a terrified and terrifying spectre.’<sup>36</sup>



Figure 6: Elizabeth Siddal, *A Woman and a Spectre*, pencil and ink drawing  
© The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

36 Taylor, 'Beatrix/Creatrix', 34.

How did, then, Elizabeth Siddal negotiate the Sleeping Beauty myth constructed around herself? Did she narrate a different story? My contention is that Siddal, especially in her poetry, rather than becoming 'obsessed' and living 'a fiction', as has been claimed,<sup>37</sup> played out an arduous, strategic negotiation with the Sleeping Beauty myth: as a poet she adapted to her own ends the images of passivity, sleep and death that Victorian culture associated with femininity.

As we shall see, Siddal's treatment of the themes of sleep and death bears striking similarities with the poetic strategies devised by her sister-in-law. Christina Rossetti had started experimenting with the Sleeping Beauty myth in 'The Dead City', the opening poem in her first collection, *Verses* (1847). Here, as has been noted,<sup>38</sup> the poet speaks with the voice of a questing prince: in his solitary rambling through the woods, he finds a palace whose inhabitants have been turned into stone 'as if spell-bound' but, rather than with the rescue of a princess, the poem ends with the protagonist's sense of fear and the sudden vanishing of the vision. The last two lines offer a metaliterary comment on the poet's inadequacy for this type of quest: 'What was I that I should see / So much hidden mystery?'<sup>39</sup> The aporia that concludes the poem epitomizes the impasse of women poets

- 37 Barbara T. Gates, *Victorian Suicide: Mad Crimes and Sad Heroines* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 149. Gates also takes for granted that Siddal's death was a suicide. A similar view of Siddal embracing her fate as a passive victim appears to be held by Elisabeth Bronfen, when she gives her evaluation of Siddal's personality as characterized, according to her, by 'an absent-minded flightiness, a moody volatility', and 'a torpid, languid sleepiness' (Bronfen, *Over her Dead Body*, 176). Bronfen, who seems unaware of the documented evidence about Siddal (her own letters, the opinions of her contemporaries), thus appears to endorse the myth of the languishing woman that her book sets out to criticize.
- 38 Dorothy Mermin, 'The Damsel, the Knight, and the Victorian Woman Poet', in Joseph Bristow, ed., *Victorian Women Poets* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1995), 64–83. Mermin also provides the example of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's problematic attempt at treating the Sleeping Beauty myth in her poem 'The Lost Bower' (Mermin, 'The Damsel, the Knight, and the Victorian Woman Poet', 66).
- 39 Christina Rossetti, 'The Dead City', in Crump, ed., *The Complete Poems*, 596–603. First published in *Verses*, privately printed by G. Polidori (London, 1847).

who wrote in the Victorian context and who, as Dorothy Mermin suggests, 'would have to play two opposing roles at one time – both knight and damsel, both subject and object'.<sup>40</sup>

The dominant discourse in Victorian culture, associating conventional femininity with feeling and sentimentality, and identifying woman with nature, created precise expectations when it came to women writing poetry, especially lyrical poems. Some women poets succeeded in escaping those strictures by employing a variety of strategies. As Mermin points out, they had to confront the 'long tradition of songs in celebration of women who are dead and silent'.<sup>41</sup> In order to do this, both Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal chose, paradoxically, to describe a poetic landscape of sleep and forgetting and to speak from an apparently ultra-passive position, that of the woman sleeping or dead.

By 1850, when she published 'Dream Land' in the first issue of *The Germ*, Christina Rossetti had already made the strategic choice that would brilliantly evade the impasse of gender expectations and the prescriptions of the damsel/knight topos: the poem evokes the figure of a woman who 'sleeps a charmed sleep' but – as it becomes clear that the protagonist is dead and 'cannot feel' – her role, though unmistakably passive, is not that of the suffering forlorn lover, nor is it that of the love-object waiting to be awakened or rescued by a hero. It is an early instance of those 'posthumous' women, in Angela Leighton's words, that will be central figures in other Rossetti poems such as 'Sound Sleep' and 'Sleeping at Last', who 'speak from a calm and careless afterlife of love'.<sup>42</sup>

Rossetti's poetic genius will make one of these 'posthumous' women speak in the first person in her masterpiece 'When I Am Dead', where the afterlife experienced by the female protagonist as a sleeping state ('dreaming through the twilight') functions as a space of resistance.<sup>43</sup> As Leighton emphasizes, not only is this poem devoid of self-pity, but it is 'strikingly

40 Mermin, 'The Damsel, the Knight, and the Victorian Woman Poet', 65.

41 Mermin, 'The Damsel, the Knight, and the Victorian Woman Poet', 73.

42 Angela Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: Writing against the Heart* (Hemel Hempstead: Haverster Wheatsheaf, 1992), 143–4.

43 Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets*, 143–5.

free of any sentiment at all', as Rossetti successfully challenges the sentimentalist tradition.<sup>44</sup>

Another instance of Christina Rossetti's subtle critique of the damsel/knight narrative is her highly original treatment of the Sleeping Beauty myth in 'The Prince's Progress', where gender roles are maintained – the princess waiting patiently for the prince-hero – but at the same time radically undermined. The prince is unfaithful and slow in arriving and when he does it is too late: the princess, self-contained in her dreamy state, has died. Significantly, this uncanny poem that centres on the hero's inadequacy and on the waiting princess as autonomous dreamer was described by Christina Rossetti, in a letter to her friend, the poet Dora Greenwell, as 'my reverse of the Sleeping Beauty'.<sup>45</sup>

Elizabeth Siddal's poetic production is rather limited compared to that of her sister-in-law, as it consists of fifteen poems and some fragments, not easily datable. Her poetry 'ranges from the perfectly realized ballad narrative, to its opposite, the overheard lyric, and to something in between, the made-to-be heard monologue'.<sup>46</sup> In a similar way to Christina Rossetti, although without the rich complexities of her religious allegories, Siddal succeeds in escaping the sentimentalist tradition and challenging gender roles when she writes about love and sleep. Unlike Rossetti's Sleeping Beauty in 'The Prince's Progress', the protagonist of Siddal's poem 'Worn Out' is not a virginal bride, but a woman who is already so experienced in love that she cannot love any longer: 'I cannot give to thee the love / I gave so long ago'.<sup>47</sup> This brief dramatic monologue conveys a sense of exhaustion, tiredness, sleepiness, with literal and metaphorical meanings reinforcing each other: in the opening verses the female speaker, on the point of falling asleep in the arms of her lover, describes herself with vivid details, looking for comfort in the masculine embrace, but her emotional detachment from him is revealed in the stanza's concluding line:

44 Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets*, 145.

45 See Crump, ed., *The Complete Poems*, 913.

46 Hassett, 'Elizabeth Siddal's Poetry', 464.

47 This and the following quotations of Siddal's verses are taken from the manuscripts in the Bryson collection at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

Thy strong arms are around me, love  
My head is on thy breast;  
Low words of comfort come from thee  
Yet my soul has no rest.

As Hassett has noted, an important point in Siddal's poetry is that 'it is the representation, promise, and illusion of love – not the faithless male lover – that [...] engages her attention'.<sup>48</sup> 'Worn Out', in particular, concentrates on the speaker's weariness of love ('I can but give a tired heart') which, far from being a sentimental topos, is a longing for indifference and insensibility. These will be found in sleep, eventually a solitary condition for the protagonist, after she dismisses her lover in the final stanza:

Yet keep thine arms around me, love,  
Until I fall to sleep;  
Then leave me, saying no goodbye,  
Lest I might wake and weep.

Sleep as a place of comfort, remoteness and resistance also occurs in the conclusion of the ballad 'True Love', that offers a typically Pre-Raphaelite medieval theme and setting, with the innovation of a woman's perspective: the female speaker kneels at the grave of her lover, Earl Richard, and her destiny – it is hinted – is that of a forced marriage ('that other is waiting to claim his pale bride'). But in the concluding lines the protagonist's apparent weakness is turned into the affirmation of her desire, though a tragic one:

Then they shall find me  
Close at thy head,  
Watching or fainting,  
Sleeping or dead.

Love and sleep, and sleep as an act of resistance, are at the centre of what is considered Siddal's best poem, that stands out for the originality of its

48 Hassett, 'Elizabeth Siddal's Poetry', 462.

poetic mood: 'A Year and a Day' (ca. 1855).<sup>49</sup> It is an intensely hallucinatory lyric, in which the female protagonist lies down on the grassy bank of a river in a state of dreaminess, in a dimension where time is suspended. The perspective from which she speaks is one from *below*, reminiscent of Rossetti's 'When I Am Dead':

I lie among the tall green grass  
That bends above my head  
And covers up my wasted face  
And folds me in its bed  
Tenderly and lovingly  
Like grass above the dead.

Images of an unfriendly nature and sad memories of a past life converge in the mind of the solitary, dreaming woman. In her lying position her vision is obscured by the summer foliage and the tall grass above her head. She hears the birds above her head sing a dissonant song, while kaleidoscopic images of past and present fluctuate in her mind like in a dream or an opium trance – with a surreal disruption of the linearity of time:

Dim phantoms of an unknown ill-health  
Float through my tired brain;  
The unformed visions of my life  
Pass by in ghostly train;  
Some pause to touch me on the cheek,  
Some scatter tears like rain.

Nature in this poem possesses an uncanny quality, and the river flows with the hypnotic fluidity of alliteration:

- 49 First published in W.M. Rossetti, 'Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal', 176–7. Although Lewis and Lasner suggest 1857 as a probable date of composition (*Poems and Drawings of Elizabeth Siddal*, 24), the poem must be dated at least 1855, as two of its stanzas are written at the back of a draft of a letter addressed by Siddal to Emma Madox Brown, with a reference to an imminent trip abroad: Siddal travelled to France in September 1855. See Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*, 200 and Arcara, 'Elizabeth Siddal poetessa preraffaellita', 124.



The river ever running down  
Between its grassy bed,  
The voices of a thousand birds  
That clang above my head,  
Shall bring to me a sadder dream  
When this sad dream is dead.

The final stanza is a poetic apotheosis of sleep as the elect space for the female protagonist, where she attains her unromantic, undisturbed estrangement from pain and from love:

A silence falls upon my heart  
And hushes all its pain.  
I stretch my hands in the long grass  
And fall to sleep again,  
There to lie empty of all love  
Like beaten corn of grain.

Here the figure of a sleeping woman is evoked by the poet with the sad but detached tone of someone who has grown *indifferent* to romantic sorrows. In a very similar manner to Christina Rossetti, Siddal creates a poetic mood of forgetting and disenchantment. She refuses the conventional role of woman as love-victim by strategically taking refuge in a remote space of resistance and isolation, that of sleep, in the liminality between life and death. Her poetic expression of unfulfilled desire does not allow for any self-pity and is devoid both of sentimentality and resentment. In sleep and reverie the protagonist has found a place from which to speak, a 'posthumous' positioning analogous to that of Rossetti's 'When I Am Dead' and 'Sleeping at Last'. The final stanza of the poem expresses her calm indifference to both life and love, and the contentment found in sleep as emotional emptiness and release from the constraints of the world.

With its dreamy stream of consciousness and the hallucinatory quality of an opium trance, 'A Year and a Day' is an impressive artistic act of resistance, through which Siddal offers an unprecedented point of view: the point of view of the otherwise silent Victorian Sleeping Beauty – a woman's recovered subjectivity. What Leighton notes about Rossetti's 'posthumous' women, also applies to the protagonist of Siddal's poem, who speaks not

from the grave but from a trance-like sleep: 'they are not heavenly Beatrices or Blessed Damozels [...] whose role is to lead the quester to salvation, but heartless, fixated dreamers, whose attention [...] is focused elsewhere.'<sup>50</sup> The dreaming woman in 'A Year and a Day' is a disobedient Sleeping Beauty, not the damsel waiting for romantic salvation, but a self-contained creature practising indifference. Elizabeth Siddal has appropriated for herself the myth of the Victorian Sleeping Beauty and reversed its perspective so that its passivity becomes conscious self-withdrawal, where alienation from the world also means self-possession, and ultimately liberation.

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50 Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets*, 159–60.

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## Immortal and Deadly Icons: Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Sleeping Beauties

In Rossetti scholarship as much as in the latest popular novels published on the subject, the enigmatic character of Elizabeth Siddal has attracted a lot of attention and fuelled many critical debates.<sup>1</sup> The most recent accounts of her life rather make it sound like an inverted fairy tale: while in most versions of the 'Sleeping Beauty' fairy tale, the story starts with a dramatic curse followed by a tragic accident that induces the long life-in-death state and is eventually relieved by the kissing of prince charming, the life of Lizzie Siddal sounds like a long life-in-death agony.

The story of how the frail red-haired girl was discovered by Rossetti's friend, Deverell, in a milliner's shop in 1848, how she then became Rossetti's muse and endured long years of suffering from various ailments including the birth of a stillborn daughter, only to commit suicide through laudanum in 1862 (at the age of thirty-two), has long prompted biographers and critics alike to picture Elizabeth Siddal as a victim of male desire and the artist's narcissism. Simultaneously, contemporary testimonies and a fair amount of speculation argued that Rossetti himself repeatedly acted as a ruthless prince going as far as disturbing his beloved's final rest by having her coffin exhumed and searched seven years after her death to retrieve his manuscript of poems buried with her.

By contrast, this article intends to show that the Sleeping Beauty motif, rather than a theme, proves to be a fruitful trope to account for the fascination the female icon holds to our day and actually provides an interesting

1 For a discussion of Elizabeth Siddal's poetry, see Jan Marsh, *The Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1985). See also Elisabeth Bronfen, *Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 168–78.

lens through which one might view Rossetti's representation of women. What's more, considering Rossetti's representation of Lizzie Siddal in the light of the Sleeping Beauty paradigm should allow us both to question the assumptions that are commonly made about women artists in general and to appreciate the difficulty of studying the artistic production of that particular class of women who, while being a source of inspiration of many a poem or a painting, were all at once brought to life and reduced to silence by their creative male partners.

### Framing Lizzie or the Lady Freezes

As Deborah Cherry and Griselda Pollock effectively demonstrated in their seminal article of 1984,<sup>2</sup> the nature of Lizzie Siddal's identity has been so fluctuating that her very existence seems from the start to have been determined by hearsay, biased impressions from visitors and unreliable narrators.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, her physical appearance has been largely both circumscribed by repeated descriptions and sublimated by the many pictures she appears in. In her Rossetti biography, Jan Marsh thus reconstructs a comprehensive – and yet hybrid – portrait of Lizzie Siddal by combining references to reported physical details and to specific paintings or quotes by Rossetti. The overall effect is dynamic and offers a very attractive but highly romanticized portrait of the young girl:

Lizzie had copper-coloured hair, and such translucent skin that when she looked down demurely, as Victorian girls were taught to do, her eyes seemed almost visible through the lids. She was tall and slim in an age that praised the petite: Allingham recalled her 'long' thin limbs. Her mouth was imperfect, the lower lip tucked under

- 2 Deborah Cherry and Griselda Pollock, 'Woman as Sign in Pre-Raphaelite Literature: A Study of The Representation of Elizabeth Siddall', *Art History* 7 (1984), 206–27.
- 3 Thomas Hall Caine, *Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London: Elliot Stock, 1882; reprint, London: Century, 1999).

the upper 'as it strove to kiss itself' in Rossetti's more partial words.<sup>4</sup> She spoke hesitantly, but laughed aloud, with a sideways sense of humour. Sometimes, she looked as frail and beautiful as Ophelia;<sup>5</sup> at others, merely pinched and plain. Nor was red hair admired, being thought unlucky, even accursed. No one liked to mention freckles, which were considered blemishes. Amongst themselves, the fellows called her 'Miss Sid' or even 'the Sid' in jokey adaptation of the way beauties and courtesans were identified elsewhere in Europe. She called herself Lizzie. At twenty-two, she was just a year younger than Gabriel.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, in his most recent contribution to Rossetti scholarship, *Rossetti, Painter and Poet*, Barrie Bullen cannot avoid mentioning the same unreliable sources to give a sense of Siddal's appearance. Even though his point is to show that Lizzie did not match the canons of beauty of the time and that she appealed to Rossetti solely because she came to embody his personal fancies, the overall impression is that she is only defined through her relationship to Rossetti:

To Rossetti, however, she looked like a figure that had stepped out of a fresco from the Campo Santo or from one of the leaves of his own drawings. [...] His propensity to fall in love, however, was as much literary as it was visual, and Lizzie's withdrawn but intelligent personality provided a perfect 'screen' for his erotic and aesthetic projections.<sup>7</sup>

As a consequence, to get a clear idea of Rossetti's wife as she really was has become nearly impossible. This impossibility has allowed the popular imagination to fashion her character as it fancies and to raise her to the level of a timeless fairy tale heroine. If, according to Jan Marsh, '[Rossetti] saw her as Cinderella, blessed with beauty and talent but doomed to a drabbed life',<sup>8</sup> her frequent representation as a sleeper rather points to another well-known fairy tale, 'Sleeping Beauty'. However, before exploring the multilayered

4 This is a quote from 'A Last Confession', line 231, in Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Collected Writings*, ed. Jan Marsh (London: J.M. Dent, 1999), 196.

5 Millais's painting of the same name. Siddal modeled for the painting in 1851–2 (Tate Gallery, London).

6 Jan Marsh, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Painter and Poet* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1999), 88.

7 John Barrie Bullen, *Rossetti: Painter and Poet* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2011), 54.

8 Jan Marsh, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Painter and Poet*, 110.

interpretations the analogy entails, it seems reasonable to ascertain that the main reason why Lizzie could be equated to Princess Aurora is what our contemporary medicine would call her 'chronic fatigue' symptoms and the daily ailments that got recorded in Rossetti's many drawings and writings about her.<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, in Lizzie Siddal's case, sleep or the lack thereof seemed to be a defining feature of her character – both in real life and in the paintings she appears in. Just as the heroine of 'Sleeping Beauty' is defined by her state of unconsciousness (a constant feature of the various versions of the story), so the most lasting pictures of Lizzie Siddal are about sleep or death, which are often interchangeable states of transition from one physical and mental state to another: from the dying Ophelia in Millais's painting to the dead Beatrice (with *Beata Beatrix* as a climax of a trance-like, mystical sleep), the red-haired model seems doomed but also content to be sleeping and/or dying.

Here two kinds of interpretation coalesce: on the one hand, on a purely physiological level, to a restless mind, sleep can be seen as a relief and a release from tension; on the other hand, on a more psychoanalytical level, sleep can be considered as a way to escape life and its contingencies and maintain body and mind in an equilibrium: as Bruno Bettelheim underlines in his classical study on the psychological dimension of fairy tales,<sup>10</sup> sleep is often a way for the adolescent body (regardless of gender) to avoid growing up and maturing. In such fairy tales as 'Sleeping Beauty', the young princess's hundred-year sleep is used as a metaphor to indicate the girl's maturation into womanhood.

- 9 The correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti abounds in references to Lizzie's poor health. See for example, the letter he writes to Brown on 22 April: 'Indeed it has been that kind of pain which can never remember at its full, as she has seemed ready to die daily and more than once a day [...]. At any rate it makes me feel as if I had been dug out of a vault, so many times lately has it seemed to me that she could never lift her head again.' *The Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. Oswald Doughty and John Robert Wahl (London: Oxford University Press, 1965–7), vol. 2, 364. In this case, the relation between the sick young woman and the poet is so close that it leads to an inversion – the poet's life being threatened by his beloved's illness.
- 10 Bruno Bettelheim, *Psychanalyse des contes de fées* [*The Uses of Enchantment*], trans. Théo Carlier (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1976).





Figure 7: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Blessed Damozel*, 1875–1878, oil on canvas  
© Imaging Department, President and Fellows of Harvard College.

However, when examined as a larger feature of the Rossetti household, sleep (and its reversal, sleeplessness), does not only involve the nubile maiden, Lizzie Siddal, but is a recurrent concern in the life and writings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti who regularly suffered from insomnia. In the artist's creative world, sleep is both a nagging source of anxiety and the occasion for writing poetry. It is both a physiological need that the artist fails to control and yet a faculty that allows him to experiment with various degrees of consciousness and acuity of vision.

### To sleep, perchance ... : Images of Sleeping Figures in Art and Literature

Indeed, when one starts to examine sleep not only in the context of the fairy tale genre but as a larger theme in both Rossetti's painting and poetry, one has to acknowledge that things get more complex and extend beyond the metaphor of growing identified by Bettelheim; first because, regardless of biographical considerations for the model, the motif of the sleeping woman is to be found both in literature and in the arts and in separate yet allied traditions of representation; second, because even if Rossetti famously insisted that he was a poet by calling and a painter by necessity,<sup>11</sup> his own focus on the sleeping woman often drew from either field and usually combined painting and poetry to elaborate new mythologies.

Hence, even before examining the representation of sleeping Lizzie – or other female sleepers in Rossetti's painting and poetry, one has to be

11 See his often-quoted statement: 'My own belief is that I am a poet (within the limits of my own powers) primarily, and that it is my poetic tendencies that chiefly give value to my pictures: only painting being – what poetry is not – a livelihood – I have put my poetry chiefly in that form. On the other hand, the bread-and-cheese question has led to a good deal of my painting being pot-boiling and no more – whereas my verse, being unprofitable, has remained (as much as I have found time for) unprosperituted.' *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. Doughty and Wahl, vol. 1, 749–50.

aware of the long classical artistic tradition the artist was drawing from in order to make up his own mythological realm – a tradition that greatly differed from the literary sources he turned to for his writings. Indeed, as Sheila McNelly writes in her article on 'Images of Sleep in Greek and Early Roman Art', even in the classical period there was a great discrepancy between pictorial and literary sources:

In the Hellenistic period, more sleepers appear, and during the Roman Empire images of sleep increase and diversify. Sleepers become a dominant element, first in Campanian wall paintings and then on sarcophagi. This pattern contrasts with that of literature, where sleep and sleepers are often present but rarely, if ever, a dominant theme. One basic issue underlying analysis of the representation of sleepers in art, therefore, is the relationship between literature and art.<sup>12</sup>

As a poet-painter, Rossetti borrowed from both literary and artistic sources in which sleep and the sleeping maid (or youth) are a major theme. Two strands of meaning need to be clearly distinguished here even though they often get blurred within a particular piece: the occurrence of sleep as a sort of narrative device framing the plot or event depicted on the canvas and the association of woman and sleep as a codified, iconographic motif (to be compared to other more established genres such the landscape, the still life or the portrait), where sleep is a metaphor for death.

Within the first category, both in Dante's *Vita Nuova* and in *The Divine Comedy*<sup>13</sup> which both fuelled Rossetti's imagination, sleep allows the narrative to unfold and the characters to experience some kind of mystical revelation. In the course of his epic journey through Hell, Purgatory and Heaven, Dante often falls asleep, which provides a means of changing setting and dramatic relief as, for example, in the episode in which Lucia

12 Sheila McNelly, 'Ariadne and Others: Images of Sleep in Greek and Early Roman Art', *Classical Antiquity*, 4/2 (Oct. 1985), 152–92, 154.

13 As is well known, Rossetti's father was a Dante scholar and all his children were deeply influenced by the 'shadow of Dante' (the title of Maria Rossetti's book of 1871). Dante Gabriel was the first to translate the *Vita Nuova* into English and he painted many scenes taken from Dante's writings.

is seen carrying Dante asleep towards the entrance to Purgatory.<sup>14</sup> Sleep relieves, restores and enlightens, a feature one also finds in medieval texts such as Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*<sup>15</sup> and the medieval chivalric legends which not only inspired Rossetti but other Pre-Raphaelite painters (most prominently, Ford Madox Brown, William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones).<sup>16</sup> In Rossetti's own readings and illustrations of the Arthurian legend, the sleeping figure is either male or female and corresponds to the two main categories identified above. In his *Study for the Angel in 'Lancelot and the vision of the Saint Graal'* of 1857, for instance, Lancelot is seen sleeping while an angel (probably drawn from Lizzie Siddal) appears between him and Guinevere. By contrast, in his illustrations for the Moxon edition of Tennyson's version of the Sleeping Beauty tale, *The Palace of Art*, *The Lady of Shalott* (1855) and *King Arthur and the Weeping Queens* (1856–7), both drawings dramatize the death of the heroine or the hero by focusing the viewer's attention on what seems at first glance a sleeping figure.

What these early drawings indicate is not only that Rossetti was aware of the way the medieval literature and art<sup>17</sup> could be used and translated in the Victorian age but also how Tennyson's poetry and more generally romantic poetry<sup>18</sup> was 'consonant with current artistic practice' and

14 See William Blake's watercolour illustration to the scene (Fogg Art Museum), reproduced in David Bindman, *William Blake, The Divine Comedy* (Paris: Bibliothèque de l'image, 2000).

15 See 'The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus' in Jacobus of Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*.

16 The PRB's interest for the medieval ages and Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* was illustrated by their attempt at painting the Oxford Union walls and ceilings in the summer vacation of 1857. For a useful analysis of the Arthurian legend in literature and the arts in the nineteenth century, see for instance Stephanie L. Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain: the Legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

17 In her authoritative book on D.G. Rossetti, Alicia Faxon shows how Rossetti's illustrations for the Moxon Tennyson are based on a French manuscript. See Alicia Craig Faxon, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Paris: Belfond, 1980), 93.

18 Walter Scott's *The Lady of the Lake*, which also drew from the Arthurian legend was one of Rossetti's earliest readings as a young man.

contemporary ideals.<sup>19</sup> In this context – whether male or female – the sleeping figure could appear as a potent hyphen between subject and object, a way to invest painting with the narrative and introspective qualities one finds in poetry ‘to construct an imaginary world that [is] self-contained and autonomous’.<sup>20</sup>

However, even in Rossetti's more imaginative early drawings and paintings, one has to acknowledge that sleep itself seems to be a gendered attribute as it does not affect men and women in the same way: when men gain knowledge and insight while sleeping (experiencing dreams and visions), women are often doomed to sleeping until the end of time – or until a princely presence comes along. Even though a full inquiry on the artistic representation of sleeping men might prove the theme to be a fruitful trope,<sup>21</sup> one has to admit that in Rossetti's artistic production alone, the number of sleeping women greatly outnumbers the number of men asleep,<sup>22</sup> reflecting a broader tendency to associate women and sleep regardless of any sense of a narrative.

Indeed, as Sheila McNally remarks in her article on sleep in art in the Greek and Roman tradition the two sleepers with the longest-lasting popularity – though not necessarily the most frequent at any given moment – are women: the maenad and Ariadne.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, in his article about women and sleep covering a longer period, Udo Kultermann<sup>24</sup> demonstrates that the sleeping woman motif goes back to prehistoric times, the earliest known representation of a sleeping female – a fertility goddess simply referred to

19 Beverly Taylor and Elisabeth Brewer, *The Return of King Arthur: British and American Arthurian Literature Since 1800* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1983), 131.

20 Taylor and Brewer, *The Return of King Arthur*, 130.

21 In romantic poetry, one might of course think of Keats's *Endymion* but also of his poem ‘Sleep and Poetry’.

22 ‘The Blessed Damozel’ is an interesting case where roles are somehow reversed as the lady is shown alive in heaven and the sleeping lover occupies the marginal predella space of the painting. On this case, see *infra*.

23 Sheila McNelly, ‘Ariadne and Others: Images of Sleep in Greek and Early Roman Art’, 155.

24 Udo Kultermann, ‘Woman Asleep and the Artist’, *Artibus et Historiae*, 11/22 (1990), 129–91.

as the 'Sleeping Lady' – originating in Malta (terra-cotta statuette, circa 12cm in length). However as the art historian demonstrates when examining the representation of woman asleep across the ages, the same tendency mentioned above to picture women rather than men asleep and to use the well-known motif to stage their imagined or real deaths also dominates the evolution of the iconographic theme. On the one hand, he argues, a tradition dating back to antiquity associates sleeping women with nature or the natural cycle (as for instance, in Canova's *Sleeping Nymph* of 1820–4, which was very popular throughout the nineteenth century); on the other, he argues, a more modern trend actually challenges this tradition and points to a more psychological aspect of sleep in relation to anxiety and the unconscious (such as in Goya's *The Sleep of Reason* or Fuseli's *Nightmare*). In both cases, what is clear is that the sleeping woman is always the object of the male gaze, even when a male presence is neither pictured nor described but only felt through the representation of the sleeping woman herself, for, as Ernst Van Alphen notes, in the lifelong tradition of the female nude, the sleeping woman is first and foremost a way of placing 'women on display for the voyeuristic pleasure of the male spectator'.<sup>25</sup>

Within the scope of this article, what the overall background to the literary and artistic 'sleeping woman' motif tells us is that Rossetti's depiction of Lizzie Siddal and other women asleep far exceeds the biographical and offers an opportunity to reflect on the ways in which, in Rossetti's art, the mythological frame is used as a pretext to reveal the female body and explore the psyche's inner life. Conversely, the narrative frame makes it possible to reactivate the artistic reservoir of images. To return to the 'Sleeping Beauty' fairy tale itself, the most famous illustration of this interplay between the literary and the artistic imaginary that was popular in Rossetti's time was probably Perrault's *Sleeping Beauty* by Gustave Doré (published in 1867), which both displays and displaces references to classical antiquity. As Adeline Tintner remarks, '[t]he young woman [is seen]

25 Ernst Van Alphen, *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992), 169.

sleeping with her hand in exactly the same position as the Vatican Ariadne.<sup>26</sup> Doré's illustrations were as popular among children as among adults, and in a letter to his brother in September 1846, Rossetti himself mentions buying a selection of Perrault's fairy tales.<sup>27</sup>

Being aware of all these threads should now enable us to look more specifically at Rossetti's painting and poetry in relation to the Sleeping Beauty motif and see how his art uses some of the conventions identified above but how he often changes the story – sometimes even inviting the reader and the viewer to recreate a story of their own.

### Sleeping Beauty in Rossetti's Poems: The Watchful Prince and his Muse

To most commentators of Rossetti's painting and poetry, the obvious place to start when looking at the poet-painter's appropriation or adaptation of the Sleeping Beauty paradigm is probably the parts in which Lizzie Siddal appears as a major figure, as if her legend had so outgrown<sup>28</sup> the bounds of Rossetti's art as to overshadow the other sleeping women that people his imaginary world. And yet, any survey of his poetry soon reveals that even before Rossetti met Lizzie Siddal, he had somehow set the scene and absorbed the most potent imagery depicting the sleeping woman in order to imbue his poetry and his painting with romanticism tinged with supernatural elements borrowed from the Gothic, especially from Edgar Allan Poe's writings. Thus, as Elisabeth Bronfen aptly noted, '[i]t

26 Adeline Tintner, 'The Sleeping Woman: A Victorian Fantasy', *The Pre-Raphaelite Review* 2 (Nov. 1978), 15.

27 *The Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. Doughty and Wahl, vol. 2, 28.

28 The allusion here is to the legendary anecdote according to which, when Lizzie's coffin was exhumed, her 'hair had continued to grow so long, so beautiful, so luxuriantly as to fill the coffin with its gold'. Oswald Doughty, *A Victorian Romantic: Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London: Frederick Muller, 1949), 417.

is remarkable that Rossetti was possessed by the notion of a dead beloved while his chosen muse was still alive, indeed even before he had met her. It seems as if Elizabeth Siddal had to die so that she could fulfil the role he had designed for her in his imagination.<sup>29</sup>

In those early writings, the age-old metaphor of death as sleep does not necessarily imply a love relationship as demonstrated in the long poem 'My Sister's Sleep' and rather explores the transition from one state of being to another, or in Jerome McGann's words, 'what it means to undergo a fresh experience, or – as Shelley would have said – to have the veil of familiarity torn away'.<sup>30</sup>

The first version of the poem was written in 1847 and later published in the *Germ* (1850) under the title 'Songs of One Household n°1' at a time when Rossetti was producing his most religious paintings – *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* and *Ecce Ancilla Domini* – and can be considered as setting the tone to the young Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood's aesthetic ideals. As William Michael Rossetti first declared about the poem, one can say that it 'shows in an eminent degree one of the influences which guided the [PRB] movement: the intimate intertexture of a spiritual sense with a material form; *small actualities made vocal of lofty meanings*'.<sup>31</sup> Interestingly enough, the most striking feature in the poem and in the revisions that Rossetti made to the first version, is the emphasis on the absence of sound and words: in the new version (1870), the words of prayer that the mother utters and the narrator repeats after her are removed and the whole attention is focused on a visual scene: a woman asleep.

However, whereas the first version of the poem only describes the woman's deceased body in a recognizable posture ('her uplaid arms / Covered her bosom, I believe', lines 3–4), the second version underlines the process of the body slowly drifting into death as if death were the natural outcome of sleep: 'She fell asleep on Christmas Eve:/ At length the long-ungranted

29 Elisabeth Bronfen, *Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 171.

30 Jerome McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Game That Must Be Lost* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2000), 17.

31 Quoted in McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 18.



shade / Of weary eyelids overweigh'd! / The pain nought else might yet relieve' (lines 1–4, 1870). In this later version, all traces of religiosity have been erased and the whole atmosphere has been altered to suggest a supernatural atmosphere akin to that in Edgar Allan Poe's poem, 'The Sleeper', which was illustrated by Rossetti at around the same time. As in Poe's poem, sleep and death are equated and offer a window into a mystical realm. Rossetti's illustration to the poem highlights the close relationship between death and sleep by showing sleeping Irene (Poe's heroine in 'The Sleeper') framed by an arched window through which one can make out the 'pale-sheeted ghosts' (line 44) going by.

In both Rossetti's drawing and poetic rewriting of Poe's tale, the male poet watches over the female body and uses sleep as a device to contemplate womanhood at rest. As a counterpoint to the 'drawer full of Guggums'<sup>32</sup> that records Rossetti's passion for his sickly princess in real life, Rossetti's poetry repeatedly pictures women as 'embowered' in an enclosed space that miraculously opens up under the pressure of a princely brimming kiss. In this case, sleep does not always weaken and reduce the sleeper to an object but can also be seen as a direct consequence of fleshly pleasure and physical exhaustion.

In one of his most famous poems, 'Jenny' (begun in 1846), Rossetti thus cultivates the ambiguity that the spectacle of a fallen woman's sleeping figure might convey. Contrary to his numerous drawings showing Lizzie as a sickly woman asleep, reclining in a chaise longue, her head often resting on a pillow, the verbal description of Jenny asleep starts with a lively portrait of the young woman, 'Lazy, laughing, languid Jenny' (line 1) whose head has 'grown light / With all our dances' (line 5). The sleeping prostitute is plunged in a state of unconsciousness that renders her sensuality harmless, in a process that Georges Bataille describes thus:

32 This is an allusion to Ford Madox Brown's remark in his journal that Dante Gabriel Rossetti was busy 'drawing wonderful and lovely Guggums one after another, each one a fresh charm, each one stamped with immortality, and his picture never advancing.' Quoted in William Michael Rossetti, ed., *Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism. Papers 1854 to 1862* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1899; reprint New York: AMS Press, 1971), 19.

The erotic value of feminine forms is linked to the effacement of that natural heaviness that recalls the material use of the members and the necessity of a skeleton. The more unreal the forms, the less clearly they are subject to animal truth, to the physiological truth of the human body, the better they answer to the generally accepted image of the desirable woman.<sup>33</sup>

As the poem unfolds, the narrator (a young student) constantly reminds the reader of the innocuousness of her condition as her head rests on his knee:

Why Jenny, you're asleep, at last! –  
 Asleep, poor Jenny, hard and fast, –  
 So young and soft and tired; so fair,  
 With chin thus nestled in your hair,  
 Mouth quiet, eyelids almost blue  
 As if some sky of dreams shone through  
 Just as another woman sleeps! (lines 171–7)

In the course of the poem, though, the narrator is seen struggling with the various images that the sleeping woman calls up: sometimes, she is hailed as a mock-Virgin Mary (in the parody of the Hail Mary, line 18), sometimes she is seen as a rose or a book. Sometimes she is a painter's ideal model, sometimes a forbidden text – in every case, she is a cipher, a symbol of female sensuality and the embodiment of all the Sleeping Beauty types we have seen above, from the pagan fertility goddess to the mythological Danae Jupiter rapes in her sleep. In this example, all aspects of the Sleeping Beauty paradigm are combined so that the moral consciousness of narrator and reader alike are shaken and moved back and forth. Indeed, as Barrie Bullen remarks, the narrator is torn between contradictory attitudes towards the sleeper. 'A feeling of perpetual movement pervades the poem. The cerebral and corporeal "dancing" with which it opens, movement which is intensified by contrast with the supine passivity of Jenny herself, is central to its dynamic and propels it forward.'<sup>34</sup>

33 Quoted in Van Alphen, *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self*, 171.

34 Bullen, *Rossetti: Painter and Poet*, 23.

As in a *tableau vivant*, Jenny is both the focus of the narrator's gaze – a passive sleeping maid – and the unwilling actress of his active fancy or day-dream: in a strange inverted strip-tease scene, the narrator imagines that his sleeping lover awakes and envisions her grateful reaction to his 'gift' (which he declares to be coins of gold): 'I think I see you wake, / And rub your eyes for me and shake my gold', lines 374–5).

In this example, all aspects of the sleeping woman are depicted and merge to construct an ambivalent image of the Sleeping Beauty motif. If, in Christina Rossetti's famous lines, the male poet pictures the sleeping muse 'not as she is but as she fills his dreams', he also questions the commodification of women and suggests that empathy or love may move the borders of conventionality to allow the dormant princess to wake up and fully come into her own.

In the *House of Life* poems, Rossetti thus does not so much picture his beloved as a sleeping muse than as a sexually active beauty who sometimes receives, sometimes initiates sensual pleasure and loving embraces. In his most explicit poem about sensual love, 'Nuptial Sleep', the poet uses the trope of sleep as a metaphor of the lovers' sexual embrace. The first lines of the sonnet clearly allude to sexual climax and the seeming *petite mort* [the little death] experience of bodily pleasure. Both bodies are depicted as drifting from one level of reality to another. Whereas the first stanza of the poem describes the movement of the lovers' heaving bodies and their gradual falling apart ('where they lay apart', line 8) and falling asleep, the second stanza explores the multiple stages of sleep:

Sleep sank them lower than the tide of dreams,  
And their dreams watched them sink, and slid away.  
Slowly their souls swam up again, through gleams  
Of watered light and dull drowned waifs of day;  
Till from some wonder of new woods and streams  
He woke, and wondered more: for there she lay. (lines 9–14)

As in other poems from *The House of Life*, Rossetti uses allegory to give a stronger sense of the body and mind divide. Sleep does not only affect the woman as both lovers are 'sunk lower than the tide of dreams' and then regain a state of half-consciousness ('Slowly their souls swam up again,

through gleams / Of watered light and dull drowned waifs of day', lines 11–12). The final lines do point in two directions and can be interpreted in different ways, which I suggest, are not irreconcilable.

On the one hand, the male lover's wonder at the presence and beauty of the woman 'bodied forth' by the act of love is akin to a new birth: as Adam first discovering Eve by his side, or Renaissance viewers contemplating *The Birth of Venus*, the male lover's mind is uplifted by the spectacle of her ideal beauty.<sup>35</sup> Her recumbent body does call up an array of images of sleeping Venuses. However, as Rossetti himself suggests, just like Alexandre Cabanel's painting, *Venus*,<sup>36</sup> the lady is not asleep but she is a *wonder*<sup>37</sup> – a supernatural being whose powers transcend her physical qualities.

Indeed, as Rossetti writes about the sonnet in his reply to Buchanan's accusation of 'fleshly poetry': 'The sonnet describes a dream of divided love momentarily re-united by the longing fancy; and in the imagery of the dream, the face of the beloved rises through deep dark water to kiss the lover.'<sup>38</sup> In a reverse pattern to Ophelia drowning, Rossetti's sleeping muse emerges from the depths of erotic love as a powerful goddess whose kisses have the ability to restore the lovers' lost unity and to miraculously regenerate:<sup>39</sup>

35 The poem's original title was 'Placata Venere', a clear reference to the classical theme of Venus and to Boticcelli's *The Birth of Venus*.

36 Alexandre Cabanel's oil painting, *The Birth of Venus* (1863) was first exhibited in the 1863 Paris Salon and Rossetti must have at least heard of it, if not seen it.

37 The term recalls Henry James's comment after meeting Jane Morris at Kelmscott: 'Je n'en reviens pas – she haunts me still. A figure cut out of a missal – out of one of Rossetti's or Hunt's pictures – to say this gives but a faint idea of her, because when such an image puts on flesh and blood, it is an apparition of fearful and wonderful intensity. It's hard to say whether she's a grand synthesis of all the Pre-Raphaelite pictures ever made – whether she's an original or copy. In either case she is a wonder.' Quoted in Marsh, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 364.

38 Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 'The Stealthy School of Criticism', *The Athenaeum* (December 1871).

39 One thinks here of Rossetti's *Bocca Bacciata* (oil painting, 1859, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) and Boccaccio's line that 'A kissed mouth doesn't lose its freshness, for like

Then the dark ripples spread to waving hair,  
 And as I stooped, his own lips rising there  
 Bubbled with brimming kisses at my mouth. ('Willowwood I' lines 12–14)

In this way, returning the kiss is a way to transfer creativity from the male creator to the female subject. In a gesture akin to that of Pygmalion feeling Galatea's body warm up at his touch, Rossetti suggests a transaction between sleep or death and life that enables woman to come alive with new, blooming creativity. In this respect, as Florence Boos points out, '[the] kiss is not the property of any one person but rather the creation of a shared boundary'.<sup>40</sup> After slumbering in the shadow of her male creator, beauty will awake with a stronger sense of self.

Contrary to the feminist readings that emphasize how Rossetti silenced his feminine models and seemed to absorb their creative breath, I would suggest, in line with Nina Auerbach,<sup>41</sup> that a fresh look at the female heroines that pervade his poems and his paintings argues for his promotion of unhindered and powerful womanhood. Far from being passive or conventional enough to settle down, get married and have children, the Rossettian Beauty is a queen of hearts.<sup>42</sup>

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the moon it always renews itself.' (Quoted in John Barrie Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 124).

40 Florence Boos, *The Poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Critical Reading and Source Study* (The Hague: Mouton & Co. B.V. Publishers, 1976), 64.

41 Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1982).

42 This is an allusion to Rossetti's oil painting, *Regina Cordium (Queen of Hearts)*, 1860 (Johannesburg Art Gallery).

## The Awakening Beauty: From Princess to Queen

In both his mature painting and poetry Rossetti keeps exploring the blurred frontier between sleep, unconsciousness and death to raise the feminine persona to a heightened level of presence. In his most striking portrait of Lizzie Siddal as Dante's Beatrice, *Beata Beatrix*, the woman is pictured hovering between life and death. As Nina Auerbach remarks, 'she has not yet died but has miraculously taken into herself life and death simultaneously'.<sup>43</sup>

In the same way, in his poetry, the gradual confusion between life and death allows the poet to expand his horizons and move beyond the romantic ballad into a kind of dramatic monologue that takes place in a liminal place, neither earth nor heaven, but: 'the rampart of God's house'. In his famous analysis of Rossetti's poetry in *Appreciations*, Walter Pater was the first to point out the paradox of the poet's heaven when, after alluding to Swedenborg's theories and Rossetti's belief in mesmerism he added: 'Dream-land, as we said, with its 'phantoms of the body', deftly coming and going on love's service, is to him, in no mere fancy of speech, a real country, a veritable expansion of, or addition to, our waking life'.<sup>44</sup>

Thus in 'The Blessed Damozel', the heavenly beauty is wide awake to the sense of desire as she longs for her lover who has remained on earth. Furthering Tennyson's image in his sonnet 'To A Lady Sleeping', where the lady is seen 'with eyes dropt downward through the blue serene', while 'Over heaven's parapets the angels lean', Rossetti's damozel leans over the bar, 'until her bosom must have made / The bar she leaned on warm, / And the lilies lay as if asleep / Along her bended arm'. In his painting of 1870, *The Blessed Damozel* thus stands tall (see Figure 7).

Conversely, her male and earthbound lover is seen reclining in a posture recalling the iconography of Endymion asleep. In this version of the Victorian queen, we again find evidence that 'The Victorian queen is not

43 Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon*, 39.

44 Walter Pater, *Appreciations with An Essay on Style* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1889), 250.

the anti-type of the Victorian victim but the release of the victim into the full use of her powers'.<sup>45</sup>

In the same way, through sleep or death, most of Rossetti's heroines acquire freedom and the power to mesmerize or entrance the viewer or the reader. Here examples abound such as 'Sister Helen', 'A Last Confession', 'The Bride's Prelude' or 'Lady Lilith'. In every case, the woman's sleep or trance is not to be equated with passivity but can be seen as the prelude of her coming into mature, outspoken womanhood.<sup>46</sup> Instead of submitting the sleeping maiden to sexual aggression and reducing her to a domestic figure, the princely poet and painter can therefore be seen as an agent promoting or even provoking the simple maid to come into her own and become a queen. In Rossetti's immediate entourage, both Lizzie Siddal and the poet's sister, Christina Rossetti (who also modelled for her brother), rose to the challenge and offered original responses to his urge for the lady to fulfil her own dreams.

Throughout her poetry, Christina Rossetti demonstrates that woman's place in the world may not be 'the lowest place' she claims for herself. Thus, as new critical approaches to her writings have shown, one of her most famous poems, *Goblin Market*, invites her readers to reflect on the ways in which women can remain both the subject and the object of contemplation. In this instance, as Lorraine Kooistra argues, 'the dynamics of looking in *Goblin Market* radically challenge the binary opposition between active male "see-er" and passive female "seen"'. She adds:

Rossetti's fantasy posits a world in which women can take pleasure in looking and survive the ordeals of being looked at to emerge triumphant as storytellers who deliberately display themselves to the gaze of others as part of an exemplary spectacle – a redemptive image of feminine power and Christian virtue to be seen, understood, and imitated.<sup>47</sup>

45 Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon*, 39.

46 Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon*, 40.

47 Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, 'Visualizing the Fantastic Subject: *Goblin Market* and the Gaze', in Mary Arseneau, Antony H. Harrison and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, eds, *The Culture of Christina Rossetti: Female Poetics and Victorian Contexts* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999), 137–69, 141.

In the same fashion, as Susan Conley has convincingly argued,<sup>48</sup> Christina Rossetti's lyrics in which the speaker is a dead or dying woman seem to take the image of the confined or incarcerated woman so prevalent in Victorian literature and art to a logical extreme. As a consequence, '[I]n these poems, death becomes both an indictment of life and the moment of revenge on oppression, an opportunity, paradoxically, for the dead woman to exercise power and control.'<sup>49</sup> Christina Rossetti's sonnets 'After Death' and 'Remember', which were both written in 1849 have thus been repeatedly and convincingly analysed as instances in which the sleep of death was to be interpreted as a 'bitter sweet victory over the unloving living'.<sup>50</sup>

However, if one recalls Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poem 'My Sister's Sleep' mentioned above, one can only be struck by the common imagery used by Christina in 'After Death':

The curtains were half drawn, the floor was swept  
And strewn with rushes, rosemary and may  
Lay thick upon the bed on which I lay,  
Where through the lattice ivy-shadows crept.  
He leaned above me, thinking that I slept  
And could not hear him; but I heard him say:  
'Poor child, poor child:' and as he turned away  
Came a deep silence, and I knew he wept.  
He did not touch the shroud, or raise the fold  
That hid my face, or take my hand in his,  
Or ruffle the smooth pillows for my head:  
He did not love me living; but once dead  
He pitied me; and very sweet it is  
To know he still is warm though I am cold.<sup>51</sup>

48 Susan Conley, 'Rossetti's Cold Women', in Arseneau, Harrison and Kooistra, eds, *The Culture of Christina Rossetti*, 260–84.

49 Conley, 'Rossetti's Cold Women', 265.

50 Conley, 'Rossetti's Cold Women', 272.

51 'The Unseen World' in Edmund Clarence Stedman, ed., *A Victorian Anthology* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1895), 376.



In her analysis, Susan Conley underlines the Pre-Raphaelite atmosphere of the sonnet. As she writes:

The first quatrain suggests an archaic, perhaps medieval setting<sup>52</sup> – the rushes, herbs, and flowers, and the ivy-covered lattice window – and this, as part of a deathbed scene, immediately conjures the world of Pre-Raphaelite gothic. Enhancing this is the effect of the uncanny, produced by the contrast between the speaker's straightforward, nonemotive reportage, and the awareness that she is dead.<sup>53</sup>

As a response to 'My Sister's Sleep', the sonnet stages a woman's death. However, 'the vantage point of death means that [the dead woman] can secretly watch "him", but she also watches herself being watched.'<sup>54</sup> Whereas in Rossetti's poem, the male persona is the omnipotent narrator who 'knew that [his sister] was dead' (line 55), hid his face, held his breath and spoke no word (49–51), here the female character – though dead – witnesses her male lover's distress and paralysis. Faced with the spectacle of his beloved's death, the lover can only watch and mutter words of regret. By contrast, through death, the woman becomes a Christ-like figure who cannot be seen or touched ('noli me tangere'), one whose body does not induce feelings of love but compassion.

In the same way, in her own poetry, Lizzie Siddal uses the stance of the dying/dead muse as a way to overcome the passing of time and love.<sup>55</sup>

52 The setting also evokes the beginning of D.G. Rossetti's unfinished poem 'A Bride's Prelude'.

53 Conley, 'Rossetti's Cold Women', 270.

54 Such a dialectic between watching and being watched is also powerfully illustrated by D.G. Rossetti's famous sketch, *How they Met Themselves* (c.1850–60), pen and ink on paper, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

55 In her article, 'She had not spoken of wishing to die', Ana Rosa Nobre Goncalves also stresses that, for Lizzie Siddal, suffering was a form of female endurance, empowerment and resistance strategy. Ana Rosa Nobre Goncalves, "'She had not spoken of wishing to die': Lizzie Siddal and the Ill-fate of the Rejected Women' in Bev Hog and Ana Sugiyama, eds, *Making Sense of Suffering: Theory, Practice, Representation* (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2011), 133–40.

Her poem 'A Year and a Day' thus presents the reader with a companion<sup>56</sup> to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's lyrical sonnet 'Silent Noon' (1871). However, where, in Rossetti's poem the lover urges his beloved to remain united ('Oh! Clasp we to our hearts, for deathless dower', line 13), Siddal's lyrical persona pictures sleep or death as a desirable escape from the impending loss of love. Read side by side, both poems reveal the lovers' single desire to endure and step out of the world into a realm of fancy – an imagined bower where lover and beloved might eternally embrace:

Silent Noon

Your hands lie open in the long fresh grass, –  
 The finger-points look through like rosy blooms:  
 Your eyes smile peace. The pasture gleams and glooms  
 'Neath billowing skies that scatter and amass.  
 All round our nest, far as the eye can pass,  
 Are golden kingcup-fields with silver edge  
 Where the cow-parsley skirts the hawthorn-hedge.  
 'Tis visible silence, still as the hour-glass.<sup>57</sup>

(...)

A Year and a Day

Slow days have passed that make a year,  
 Slow hours that make a day,  
 Since I could take my first dear love  
 And kiss him the old way;  
 Yet the green leaves touch me on the cheek,

56 Chronologically, Siddal's poem was probably written in the 1850s before Rossetti's. We know from the correspondence between Dante Gabriel and Christina that Dante Gabriel contemplated publishing Siddal's poetry in 1865 but never did (in part fearing more criticism due to the tone of her poetry). For more details, see Jan Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal* (London: Quartet Books, 2010) and Constance W. Hassett, 'Elizabeth Siddal's Poetry: a Problem and Some Solutions', in *Victorian Poetry*, 35/4 (Winter 1997), 443–70.

57 Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Ballads and Sonnets* (London: Ellis and White, 1881), 181.

Dear Christ, this month of May.

I lie among the tall green grass  
 That bends above my head  
 And covers up my wasted face  
 And folds me in its bed  
 Tenderly and lovingly  
 Like grass above the dead.<sup>58</sup>

(...)

Whereas Rossetti depicts the two lovers as sheltered by nature, Siddal pictures herself as part of nature. In her lines, the male observer – or Prince Charming – has been replaced by Mother Earth who welcomes her back in her bosom so that death not only relieves but consoles and allows her to fuse with the landscape around. As dust shall return to dust, so in both Christina Rossetti's and Lizzie Siddal's poetry, the sleeping muse may be dead but her power to speak and ensnare, rule men out or transform them turns her into a metamorphic creature whose propensity to sleep is equal to her ability to dream. In their poetry as in Burne-Jones's later monumental *Briar Rose* panels at Buscot Park in 1890, we can conclude with Nina Auerbach, that '[a]s a type of female power, both dormant and revealed, the Sleeping Beauty seems to contain in herself both victim and queen, the apparent passivity of the one modulating imperceptibly into the potency of the other'.<sup>59</sup>

In Rossetti's painting and poetry, the multiple threads of the Sleeping Beauty motif can be unravelled through various critical channels of criticism, from overtly feminist reading to broader literary approaches that take into account both text and image. Looking at the example of Lizzie Siddal suggests that the Sleeping Beauty paradigm not only enhanced the dramatic force of Rossetti's art but also contributed to his muse's lasting fame as a model, companion and amanuensis. Beyond the particular case

58 Roger C. Lewis and Mark Samuels Lasner, eds, *Poems and Drawings of Elizabeth Siddal*. (Wolfville, NS: Wombat Press, 1978), 16–17.

59 Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon* 41.

of Rossetti, the 'Sleeping Beauty' fairy tale seems to have captured the Victorian imagination as a larger metaphor<sup>60</sup> of society's need to adjust to a faster-moving world as epitomized by the technical and scientific wonders presented at the Crystal Palace – a glass case strangely recalling Sleeping Beauty's glass coffin – or to take refuge in new aesthetic realms, such as Burne-Jones's paintings at Buscot Park where his Sleeping Beauty remains for ever asleep in a frozen world.

Just as Victorian viewers used to crowd to see the animated Sleeping Beauty at Madame Tussaud's waxworks exhibitions, so the 'Legend of Elizabeth Siddal'<sup>61</sup> continues to prompt new narratives<sup>62</sup> and feed the popular imagination. As if the Sleeping Beauty couldn't be left alone or silent, her grave in Highgate is regularly visited, photographed, and worshipped as 'a sacred emblem of the overlooked.'<sup>63</sup> In the same, fascinating way, a website devoted to Lizzie Siddal<sup>64</sup> faithfully records people's experience of mourning (either related to the death of a loved one or child loss). In all these examples, technical and digital devices are used to reanimate the sleeping nymph.

By contrast, a curious video installation titled, 'Six Day Goodbye Poems of Ophelia' by female contemporary artist Jo Wonder has recreated Millais's *Ophelia* using bacteria as a medium and encourages viewers to complete the art installation by sending voice mails and messages to Ophelia. In the accompanying commentary to her work, the artist declares:

I like the idea of Ophelia being a beauty but made up of something that we think is disgusting. But we shouldn't really be thinking it's disgusting because in fact, roughly nine out of 10 cells in our body are actually bacteria and our bodies are also made up

60 For a particular focus on this idea, see Tintner, 'The Sleeping Woman: A Victorian Fantasy'.

61 This is the title of one of Jan Marsh's books.

62 As this article is being written, a new play, *Lizzie Siddal*, by Jeremy Green is just about to start at the Arcola Theatre in London (November–December 2013).

63 Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), 25.

64 <<http://lizziesiddal.com/portal/>>, accessed 17 September 2013.

of roughly 60% water, as Ophelia lies in the lake dying she may be feeling fantastic as her body rejoins the earth.<sup>65</sup>

So here again at last, the Sleeping Beauty lives on, not as she was but as she is imagined to have imagined herself, at home with the world around, not 'as [herself] alone, but as the meaning of all things that are, [...] The evident heart of all life sown and mown.'<sup>66</sup>

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65 Jo Wonder, artist's web page, <<http://www.jowonder.com/pages/films.htm>> accessed 17 September 2013.

66 Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 'Heart's Compass', line 8, in *Collected Writings*, ed. Jan Marsh, 289.

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## Aesthetics of Desire: Ruskin, Burne-Jones and Their Sleeping Beauties

Edward Burne-Jones (1833–98) met John Ruskin (1819–1900) in 1856, as he was preparing to start life as a painter under the guidance of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Ruskin immediately took the emerging artist under his wing. Burne-Jones, who had been reading Ruskin seriously for a few years and admired his work unreservedly, willingly became his protégé. Shortly thereafter, a most interesting and enduring friendship developed, which was as much intellectual as it was personal. Initially, Ruskin's role as a mentor to the younger man was heavily prescriptive. He even took both the artist and his wife Georgiana – whom he now called his 'dear children'<sup>1</sup> – to Italy, so that Burne-Jones could further his artistic education along the lines Ruskin envisaged. He commissioned copies of old masters and kept buying original work from Burne-Jones. He supervised closely his friend's progress and chided him when he did not approve of his work method or results. Ruskin was a compulsive teacher who hoped to educate a new generation of modern painters after his own principles. He had taken a fatherly interest in the careers of other young artists, of the first Pre-Raphaelite wave. Sadly, few of them returned his affection. Most notably, John Everett Millais rejected his teaching and seduced his wife. Rossetti and his wife Elizabeth Siddal, who had both benefited from Ruskin's financial generosity, turned their backs on him. Of all his protégés, Burne-Jones alone remained a close friend and continued to be interested in Ruskin's work long after he outgrew his Pre-Raphaelite beginnings.

1 Georgiana Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan & Co, 1912), vol. 1, 232.

By the early 1870s Burne-Jones had become a successful painter and no longer needed Ruskin's patronage. His work was developing away from Ruskin's teaching. The artist and critic corresponded less frequently, and saw even less of each other. On the surface, the friendship seemed to have broken up, especially after Ruskin criticized Michelangelo, whom Burne-Jones esteemed highly, in his 1871 Oxford lecture on 'The Relation between Michael Angelo and Tintoret'. Inexplicably, though, the friendship endured. Within the year Burne-Jones had suppressed his hurt and disappointment without even letting Ruskin know he had caused this serious upset. Moreover, in 1878 he represented Ruskin in court against Whistler, whose work the critic had unnecessarily attacked. Burne-Jones did this against his own wishes and artistic judgment, and at the cost of great embarrassment. He had been on friendly terms with Whistler and admired his work – but, in spite of everything, his loyalty to Ruskin took precedence. On a personal level, Ruskin had Burne-Jones's loyalty to the very end, through absence, illness and the loss of his once formidable mind. Intellectually, Burne-Jones continued to engage with Ruskin's writing even when he needed to free himself from his mentor's teaching and take a different aesthetic path. The affection which had bound the two in their idealist years, when only art seemed to matter, grew less outspoken, but remained steady, as they supported each other, often from a distance, through many of their lives' trials.

Ruskin and Burne-Jones both went to Oxford to train for the Church, at a distance of nearly twenty years. They had planned to take Holy Orders on graduation, but in the end decided to serve humanity through art. In their youths they had both planned to lead pure and pious lives, and pursue their clearly set ideals. But maturity confused their early ideals and brought along complications they had not foreseen and desires they could not comfortably express. They dealt with these challenges within the framework of their personal and intellectual friendship. Their special relationship provided a space where these unsettling changes could be brought to light and explored through their work. Writing to his friend in 1887, after a spell of illness, Burne-Jones very touchingly imagines an ideal life-and-work scenario and acknowledges his still undiminished pleasure in reading Ruskin:

I have just read the last *Praeterita* – it has been in the house all week, and it's the first time in my life that this has happened that I haven't instantly read *Praeterita*, *Fors* or a new book of thine, and it means that I am very down this winter [...]. But it picked me up brightly. [...] I wish I had lived with you always, and that we had been monks, Joan, and Georgie and Margaret monks too – painting books and being always let off divine service because of our skill in said painting. My dear, there has been nothing in my life so sweet to look back upon as that journey to Milan 25 years ago. That was the best of my days and can't be again.<sup>2</sup>

The monastic life Burne-Jones wishes for in retrospect suggests a space sheltered from the temptations of the world, where he, Ruskin and their close families could dedicate all their energies to art, in brotherly harmony. This is an ideal, artificial world, where women belong to monks' orders, monks practice art instead of religion, and time stands still, as age is of no consequence. It is a fantasy which comments symbolically on the lines along which their relationship played out and on the nature of the crises they tried to overcome. Ruskin's life's work – to read the beauty of nature and its reflection in art as pathways to understanding divinity – was often thrown off course by his own spiritual doubts and his unfulfilled desire for the Irish young girl Rose La Touche. Burne-Jones's hopes to lead a life as pure as Galahad's<sup>3</sup> were dashed when he found himself in pursuit of beauty outside his marriage and outside the canvas. For the first part of his career he followed Ruskin, his friend and mentor, in his belief that good art reflects the laws of nature, beautiful and instructive – indeed, moral – because they reveal divinity. But the mature Burne-Jones desired to be the maker of his own world on the canvas. He sought to express beauty as an aesthetic value instead of the high point of natural transience, as Ruskin understood it to be. His wish to spare Ruskin this development was an added difficulty. The enclosed monastic world Burne-Jones imagines in

- 2 The Burne-Jones archives, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; Burne-Jones to Ruskin, 1887; Joan (Severn) was Ruskin's cousin, who looked after him in his final years; Georgie (Georgiana) and Margaret were Burne-Jones's wife and daughter.
- 3 Inspired by Tennyson, Burne-Jones and his friends from Birmingham and Oxford planned in 1853 to set up the Order of Galahad for promoting chaste, pious and anti-materialistic living.

his letter would have solved all their problems: Burne-Jones would have remained in total agreement with Ruskinian moral aesthetics; temptresses would be unheard-of and the men would bask forever in the devoted love of cousin, wife and daughter, their work- and soul-mates; religious debate, including the thorny matter of mortality and afterlife would remain outside their sphere, and the immortality of art would take its place in their thoughts.

What happened, though, in real life? In what follows I would like to stop at a few points on the timeline of Ruskin's and Burne-Jones's friendship and look at how they dealt with their challenges. In an effort to express and come to terms with desires that threw their emotional and artistic lives into turmoil, they explored narratives, such as the myth of Persephone and the tale of 'Sleeping Beauty', linked to the issues which most troubled and excited them: beauty, love and lust, death and revival. Thus they were able to formalize, externalize and justify these desires, by inscribing their personal experience in a cultural and aesthetic framework. In the process, Burne-Jones acknowledged Ruskin's teaching while he departed from it. The work that Burne-Jones produced in this context, especially the *Briar Rose* series, became a very personal and surprisingly modern statement about the nature of art. Had Ruskin not descended into the darkness of his mental illness, the pictures would have also stood as an affectionate and intelligent offer to comfort him for the death of Rose.

The first stop on the timeline is 1863. Ruskin was forty-four and in love with Rose, twenty-nine years his junior. 'I had to perjure myself if I wanted a kiss,' he wrote,

and vow that I had headache or toothache or something that wouldn't go away on any other terms – And now she's got to be fifteen there's no making a pet of her any longer – and I don't know what to do.<sup>4</sup>

Ruskin had been Rose's drawing teacher for five years. They had always been very affectionate to each other, but, as time went on, Ruskin was

4 Tim Hilton, *John Ruskin* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 335.

obviously troubled by the turn his feelings had taken. To compound his distress, Rose was seriously ill. Ruskin had not seen her since the spring of 1862 and feared she was going to die. Unable to cope with these developments, he made plans to build himself a chalet in the Alps and retire from the world. Family and friends tried to dissuade him, but Ruskin resisted. He answered the pleas of Burne-Jones and his wife with suicidal abandon:

I am deeply moved [...] by all your letters. [...] You would make me entirely happy with your loves if I felt strong and as if I should have life and time to stay with you – but I have a great feeling of its being too late. [...] And I've another notion of a thing the great cliff above may be useful for, some day – or night.<sup>5</sup>

Burne-Jones responded to Ruskin's despair with encouragement:

Dearest Papa, oh, don't despair about health, or ever think it is too late, you must and shall grow strong, and do lots of work, and when you are very old you shall sleep somewhere where we can kiss every stone and blade of grass that covers you.<sup>6</sup>

Significantly, Burne-Jones did not send wishes for Rose's recovery or courage in courtship. He referred tactfully to Ruskin's love-sickness as ill-health, mentioned Ruskin's cure – work – and assured him of 'his children's' adulation. He also promised him a set of tapestries for his house. The subjects were from Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, a tale of moral revision and symbolic revival. In the poem, Chaucer falls asleep in a meadow strewn with white and red daisies – the colours of life and death, or purity and passion – and dreams that he is visited by the god of love. Love asks him to make amends for portraying women in a treacherous light, as Chaucer had done in *Troilus and Criseyde*, and retell the stories of twenty 'good' women who suffered and died for love. In his correspondence with Ruskin Burne-Jones continued to describe his project: 'On one side of your fireplace will be Chaucer beginning the subject,'<sup>7</sup> dreaming up the poem in his creative

5 Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, vol 1, 266.

6 The Burne-Jones archives, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, Burne-Jones to Ruskin, September 1863.

7 Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, vol 1, 269.

sleep. The other side would show 'Love in red and white, and Alcestis in green', and round the walls there would be 'the other ladies', with a fence of red and white roses running behind the figures.<sup>8</sup>

Shall you like it, dear, and will it ever make a little amends for sorrow? I know it won't, only you will pretend it will. I suppose nothing can make amends for your troubles – I think and think about it – it is so detestable for me to be happy and you not – I can't bear that sometimes.<sup>9</sup>

The designs were to be embroidered under Georgiana Burne-Jones's supervision by girls at Winnington Hall. The Burne-Joneses had visited the school with Ruskin the previous year and sensed the school was special to him. Burne-Jones, too, had enjoyed his time among the girls. 'I can look six in the face at one time, I can play at cricket, and read aloud, and even paint with three or four looking on, and I am deeply in love with several at a time,' he recalled.<sup>10</sup> Winnington had proved a congenial retreat for both friends, as Ruskin and Burne-Jones always derived pleasure from the company of young, pretty and articulate female company. The girls would have reminded Ruskin of Rose's similar state of innocent maidenhood. To have the girls sitting for the heroines of Chaucer's tale, and themselves embroider Burne-Jones's cartoons, could only meet with Ruskin's approval. 'I should like that better than any – any – thing,' he wrote back.<sup>11</sup>

Burne-Jones, in love with several Winnington girls, was but a figure of speech to relieve Ruskin's guilt. The idea of a change of perspective in Chaucer's poem, from vilifying to sanctioning desire, would have certainly made Ruskin feel better. The women whose terrible stories Chaucer retold were symbolically brought from the dead, first as life-like visions led by the hand by Love, and then by acquiring a new identity as 'good'. In a rather roundabout way, Burne-Jones sent hope for Rose's recovery and suggested that Ruskin rethink her role in his life, re-imagining her in a new narrative.

8 The Burne-Jones archives, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, Burne-Jones to Ruskin, September 1863.

9 Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, vol 1, 269.

10 Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, vol 1, 269.

11 Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, vol 1, 266.

Chaucer asleep in the meadow was, after all, a thinly veiled Ruskin in his Alps retreat. Most interestingly, though, Burne-Jones's symbolic allusions also amount to an inverted version of the 'Sleeping Beauty' tale: the lingering prince revived by visions of beauty and goodness.

This is significant because the cartoons for the tapestries were in fact copies of designs Burne-Jones had begun to produce in 1862 to be transferred on sets of tiles by Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., together with other drawings, inspired from fairy tales: *Cinderella*, *Bluebeard* and *Sleeping Beauty*. Burne-Jones's imagination was at that time under the spell of the magical world of the Brothers Grimm, whose edition after revised edition of fairy tales, in various translations, were flooding the British book market.<sup>12</sup> Ruskin was himself aware of the the Grimm brothers' work. In *The Elements of Drawing* (1857) he had praised Cruikshank's adept illustrations for a selection of the tales, and in 1868 he was to write a preface to another selection. The German title for what we now call 'Sleeping Beauty', *Dornröschen*, translates as 'Little Wild Rose', or 'Briar Rose', and in English it often appeared as 'Rose-Bud'. We cannot be sure it is simply a coincidence that Ruskin began to talk about Rose as 'Bouton' in 1862.<sup>13</sup>

There is, of course, no evidence that Burne-Jones's *Good Women* idea had any influence on Ruskin's decision to end his Alpine exile. Most probably, he returned in November 1863 following a visit from his old university tutor, who went to Switzerland to see Ruskin at his father's request. Rose, still bedridden in Ireland, began a slow and only temporary recovery. Ruskin saw her again in December 1865 after almost three years. Her parents had brought her to London for the social season, and Ruskin managed to spend some time with her. In February 1866 he proposed. She did not refuse him, but asked him to wait three years, until she was twenty-one. At the end of the London season she returned to Ireland, and Ruskin would not see her again until 1872.

12 The first edition of *Children's and Household Tales* came out in 1812; various revisions, enlargements and translations followed.

13 Hilton, *Ruskin*, 321.

Before Rose went back to Ireland in the spring of 1866 she spent one sunny afternoon walking with Ruskin in his garden. The good weather and Rose's disposition gave Ruskin hope, and he could hardly contain his illusory happiness. The next day he sent Burne-Jones a note under the pretext of clearing time to sit for a portrait, but in reality to share his joy. 'Did you see the gleam of sunshine yesterday afternoon?' read the note. 'If you had only seen her in it, bareheaded, between *my* laurels and *my* primrose bank!'<sup>14</sup> There was no need to tell Burne-Jones who *she* was. And there was no need, either, for Ruskin to spell out that he gladly assumed the role of the prince waiting for his princess's long sleep to run its course. Fully expecting to marry Rose when she was twenty-one, Ruskin recreated her in the image of the Sleeping Beauty, bareheaded as if ready for both rest and passion, cradled among *his* flower-beds. Little did he know that the thick wall of thorns which Rose grew around herself in her self-imposed physical and spiritual exile would not part for him in three years' time, or that he would never kiss awake and claim his beloved from illness and the aridity of her religious convictions. The connotations of growth, maturity and fertility that the association with Ruskin's garden in bloom brings to the 1866 image of Rose would be lost gradually over the following years, as Ruskin identified her with other sleeping beauties beyond human awakening.

The tone of these gloomy meditations, where a discussion of art disguises Ruskin's attempt to convince himself that Rose was not forever out of reach, is set by his comments on Burne-Jones's *Amor and Alcestis* drawing, of the *Good Women* tapestries project. The figures Burne-Jones had designed were never embroidered, and Burne-Jones gave Ruskin the best part of the drawings. In his 1867 lecture 'On the Present State of Modern Art' delivered at the British Institution, Ruskin praised *Amor and Alcestis* because, he argued, Burne-Jones did not only show, like Chaucer, the 'perfect human passion', but 'the Spirit of the Love that lives beyond the grave'. The picture, Ruskin infers, is valuable because in it we can truly see how, after 'she gives up her life for her husband's, [Alcestis] is [...] restored to him

14 Ruskin to Burne-Jones, April 1866. See *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, 39 vols, ed. E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1903–12), vol. 36, 504.



from the grave'.<sup>15</sup> Well into his second year of waiting for Rose to make up her mind, Ruskin feared she might be as dead to him, and sought solace in a narrative he believed to express truth in the form of ancient wisdom.<sup>16</sup> Ruskin now found it difficult to imagine Rose as his Beauty invitingly fallen into the eroticized sleep of the maiden, waiting to be awakened to love and life. Instead, she becomes the forbidding figure of the martyr as Ruskin sublimates his desire for her into images of chaste reunions in an uncertain afterlife.<sup>17</sup>

1869 is another point on the timeline of Ruskin's and Burne-Jones's friendship that deserves closer examination. The year marks the end of certain developments begun in the early 1860s and the shaping of new perspectives in the friends' explorations of the Sleeping Beauty tale. Earlier in 1863, before he thought of retiring to the Alps, Ruskin had asked Burne-Jones to make various drawings of mythological figures to illustrate the book version of *Munera Pulveris* (1862). He valued his friend's skill most highly and was convinced that the artist would prove himself again a 'shining modern exponent'<sup>18</sup> of Ruskinian teachings about art. Finally the illustrated book project was abandoned, but, before that, Burne-Jones was already working on *The Wine of Circe*, inspired by Ruskin's description of her in *Munera Pulveris*:

Circe [...] is [the] daughter [...] of the strong elements, Sun and Sea; her power is that of frank, and full vital pleasure, which, if governed and watched, nourishes men; but, unwatched, [...] turns men into beasts, but does not slay them – leaves them, on

15 Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 19, 207–8.

16 By 1860 Ruskin had abandoned the narrowness of Evangelicalism. He believed other myths, too, should be considered alongside the Christian ones as valid expressions of man's understanding of the world.

17 Following the disproof, in the 1840s, of the historical truth of the Bible, Ruskin found it difficult to believe in afterlife. After Rose's death he renewed his faith in the Christian doctrine of salvation through contact with Spiritualism.

18 John Christian, 'The Compulsive Draughtsman', in John Christian, Elisa Korb, and Tessa Sidey, eds, *Hidden Burne-Jones: Works on Paper by Edward Burne-Jones from Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery* (Birmingham: D. Giles, 2007), 7–27, 15.

the contrary, power of revival. She is herself indeed an Enchantress; – pure Animal life; transforming – or degrading – but always wonderful.<sup>19</sup>

Burne-Jones's model for Circe was Maria Zambaco, beautiful, from a rich family, and an artist herself. As the picture progressed, so did Burne-Jones's fascination with Maria's enchanting 'power [...] of full, vital pleasure' that could 'nourish' men and also 'turn [them] into beasts'. He painted her, very fittingly, as the eternal temptress, and she became his lover. The affair put Burne-Jones's marriage in danger, upset his friends and threatened his health. It ended very publicly and embarrassingly in January 1869, in Holland Park, with Burne-Jones trying to stop Maria from killing herself because he refused to leave his wife for her. The gruesome news spread quickly among Burne-Jones's circle. Morris, his closest friend, accompanied him on a failed attempt to weather the scandal abroad, but did not do so approvingly. Ruskin, on the other hand, behaved like a true friend, showing concern and offering tacit support. In November 1868 he visited Burne-Jones daily, and paid a certain Charles Howell to move closer to Burne-Jones and keep him company.<sup>20</sup> Howell was an art dealer who finally proved to be of dubious character. In the late 1860s, though, Howell still had Ruskin's confidence and was directed to buy for him almost everything Burne-Jones produced. Howell was also the man who had introduced Maria Zambaco to Burne-Jones, and rumoured to have facilitated their early trysts.

At the time Ruskin did not know the truth about Howell. But he did know the truth about Burne-Jones's affair and chose to ignore it. It is surprising that Ruskin, the principled arbiter of moral behaviour, should now turn a blind eye. However, if we consider what he himself was going through, his quiet support for Burne-Jones makes sense. In 1868 Ruskin was tormented by his unfulfilled love. Rose had promised to write to him on Christmas Day 1867, but had not, and he was distraught. He did little work in the winter and spring of 1868 and, worn down by Rose's silence, planned to bring his writing career to a close. In early spring Ruskin was

19 Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 17, 213.

20 See Fiona MacCarthy, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite: Edward Burne-Jones and the Victorian Imagination* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), 210.

asked to give a lecture in Dublin on a topic of his choice, so he took this invitation as an opportunity to make a final statement.<sup>21</sup> It is significant that, while listless and under pressure with drafting and revising his lecture, 'The Mystery of Life and Its Arts', he also found time to write the preface to a new edition of the Grimm brothers' fairy tales. In the preface Ruskin claims that such tales perform the same cultural function as myth and legend, or even religious narratives – that is, as a repository of popular wisdom and expression of a certain truth about the human condition. 'Every fairy tale worth recording', he wrote,

is the remnant of a tradition possessing true historical value – historical in so far as it has naturally arisen out of the mind of a people under special circumstances, and risen not without meaning, nor removed altogether from the sphere of religious faith.<sup>22</sup>

Ruskin believed mythology – and now popular lore – was part of a moral system teaching the same universal values and expressing the same, unique, divine laws as Christianity. The inclusion, at this point, of fairy tales with other narratives he interpreted as a revelation of 'Heaven's continual dealing with man'<sup>23</sup> marks his increasingly explicit reliance on narratives of his choice to make sense of his relations with Rose. These intrinsically moral – in the sense of instructive – narratives, including the tales collected by the Brothers Grimm, were, believed Ruskin, lessons preparing people 'to behold, in later years, the mystery – divinely appointed to remain such to all human thought – of the fates that happen alike to the evil and the good'.<sup>24</sup>

Considering the events that followed, Ruskin's preface reads like an uncanny premonition. In May 1868 he went to Dublin to deliver his lecture, and hoped in vain that Rose would attend. He returned to London in June, 'to face the most acute crisis of his courtship'<sup>25</sup> – the result of Effie Gray Millais' correspondence with the La Touches about her marriage

21 Hilton, *Ruskin*, 413.

22 Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 19, 236.

23 Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 33, 293.

24 Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 19, 236.

25 Hilton, *Ruskin*, 416.

to Ruskin. Any conceivable attempts to convince them he was not the monster his ex-wife painted, or that he could re-marry legally, would have to come from a man without stain in deed or in thought. Ruskin was already too liberal in his religious beliefs for the La Touches' liking. Although he sympathized deeply with his friend's distress, Ruskin could not afford to be associated with the scandal of Burne-Jones's illicit affair, and for this reason his support had to be hidden from the public eye. Despite buying Burne-Jones's work through Howell, in 1869 he declined to buy the finished *Wine of Circe*, which he had commissioned. The painting illustrated closely Ruskin's 1862 vision of Circe, as a triumph of vitality, beauty and physical passion. But in 1869 Ruskin was a changed man, no longer concerned with 'the appearance of felicitous fulfilment of function in living things'.<sup>26</sup> He spoke of unconceivable pain<sup>27</sup> and death,<sup>28</sup> and despaired of ever seeing Rose again. Circe's story was about temptation, 'animal' indulgence and redemption, and these experiences were now undesirable and also unavailable to him in the emotionally arid abyss into which Rose and fate had thrown him. Ruskin would have found a perpetual reminder of the theoretical fullness of life unbearable.

But that was not the only ground for Ruskin's objection to *Circe*. In it he would have seen Burne-Jones's sin laid bare, instead of the celebration of vital beauty and physical pleasure, 'degrading' but 'wonderful', of which he had written in *Munera Pulveris*. In a sense, by painting Circe from Maria, Burne-Jones had given the best possible example of Ruskin's ideal about natural truth in art, and was paying for it dearly. He had accounted for his own experience in a double cultural frame, through the Circe myth and another reversed version of the Sleeping Beauty scenario, naturally changed

26 Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, 146.

27 C.E. Norton, ed., *Letters of John Ruskin to Charles Eliot Norton*, 2 vols (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1904), vol. 1, 209, Ruskin to Norton, 16 June 1869.

28 Ruskin to Norton, 26 April 1869. See J.L. Bradley, and I. Ousby, eds, *The Correspondence of John Ruskin and Charles Eliot Norton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 132–3.

by his temper and newly coloured from his manner of life.<sup>29</sup> Circe lives on an isolated island, and Sleeping Beauty is cut off from the world, surrounded by briars. But while the prince has to fight his way through the briarwood, Circe lures the men who approach her island in search of rest. She changes them into beasts after they greedily consume her feast, and then wakes them up from their fallen condition – a sort of sleep of the conscience, since they forget all about their journey home – at Ulysses' request. While in the fairy tale the chaste princess sleeps until her time has come to awaken to love, it is the men who fall asleep in Circe's story, having indulged their 'animal' passions. Then, from the degradation of consuming Circe's hospitality and charms, they are redeemed to the manly purity of the warrior. In his anger at Effie's scandalous reinvention of their past, it was easy for Ruskin to see in *Circe* only the parallels with Burne-Jones and his lover, and the contrived excuse he made for his transgression: his model's powers of enchantment. The La Touches' bigotry and his own desire to please Rose at all costs made Ruskin narrow down his understanding of morality, after he had revolted against such narrowness in his life-changing 1858 'un-conversion' through Veronese.<sup>30</sup> Under this enormous strain Ruskin changed his critical goal posts, and, instead of celebrating life, became particularly attracted to narratives where dutiful and chaste sleeping beauties did not reach fulfilment. From Venice, where he went in the summer of 1869 to find respite from his distress over Rose, Ruskin wrote to Burne-Jones about some pictures which had caught his eye. They were Carpaccio's series depicting the legend of St Ursula. The lofty subject of the legend, the martyrdom of a virgin princess for the Christian faith, suited perfectly Ruskin's mood and purpose, as he was trying to find in art the crutch he craved to make sense of his predicament. He revisited Carpaccio after Rose's death in 1875.

1869 thus brought together for Burne-Jones an interesting series of explorations, from vicarious and virtual to physical and downright

29 Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 19, 236.

30 In 1858 Ruskin interpreted Veronese's *Presentation of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon* as a truer representation of the Christian spirit than the Evangelical dogma, because it celebrated life, not suffering and restraint; he decided to enlarge his religious views accordingly.

confrontational, of the nature of femininity, all involving beauty and sleep. It is not surprising that later in the year he revisited the Sleeping Beauty tale in earnest, and started developing the 'small' *Briar Rose* series (1871–3). His first rendition of the tale, *The Sleeping Beauty*, had been completed in 1864 as a set of nine ornamental tiles.<sup>31</sup> It followed the narrative closely, showing the birth of the princess, the fates or wicked fairies, the fulfilment of their prophecy, the sleeping palace, the prince in the briar wood, then the awakening scene and the prince marrying the rescued princess. The study Burne-Jones began for the new series in 1869 is a larger scale reworking of the 1864 central tile which shows the prince beginning his quest. *The Prince Entering the Briar Wood*<sup>32</sup> is not much different compositionally from the tile, but looks significantly more sophisticated, as Burne-Jones's interest shifted from the narrative to a more symbolic focus on sleep and flowering briars. Walking among the dead, the prince looks lonely and confused, and his suit of armour suggests both restraint and restriction. Lost in an unfathomable tangle of briars, he searches for an unavailable and unknown woman – a situation unsurprisingly similar to Ruskin's. Two years later Burne-Jones painted a small watercolour of the sleeping princess, *Sleeping Beauty*.<sup>33</sup> Unlike the tile version, this picture shows the princess reclining on a stylized bed flanked by briars, asleep, on her own. The prince is missing and so is the climax of the story, the awakening scene. In the subsequent versions showing Beauty asleep, Burne-Jones avoids all reference to the prince kissing her awake – and it is right to ask ourselves to what extent the change was influenced by Carpaccio's depiction of St Ursula and by Ruskin's own sad story. In time, the symbolism of Burne-Jones's sleeping princesses would shift from reawakening to life and fulfilment of desire to a more personal idiom, informed by different concerns: artistic privilege, arrested time, eternal beauty and unperturbed maidenhood. This runs counter to the essence of Ruskin's teaching about art and

31 Edward Burne-Jones, *The Sleeping Beauty*, 1864, painted on tin-glazed earthenware tiles by Lucy Faulkner for Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., V&A, London.

32 Edward Burne-Jones, *The Prince Entering the Briar Wood* (1869), Houghton Hall Collection.

33 Edward Burne-Jones, *Sleeping Beauty* (1871), Manchester City Art Gallery.

would have troubled him immensely. It is just as well that he never saw any of the Sleeping Beauty pictures: the first two series (1864 and 1871–3) were commissions and went straight to their owners, and by 1890, when the third series was completed and exhibited, Ruskin's intellectual powers had irretrievably broken down.

After the 1869 lonely *Prince* and the 1871 *Sleeping Beauty*, boxed-in by the frame, her alcove and her maidenly self-sufficiency, Burne-Jones painted between 1871 and 1873 three more panels related to the tale of Sleeping Beauty, *The Briar Wood*, *The Council Chamber* and *The Rose Bower*, which he called the 'small' *Briar Rose*.<sup>34</sup> In *The Briar Wood* the prince stands at the edge of a vortex traced by the contorted bodies of his dead predecessors and branches suggesting a circular movement, threatening to absorb him into their stagnant trap. *The Council Chamber* is radically different from the tile version: the much older, white-bearded king is asleep on a throne which both shelters and dwarfs him. His courtiers have fallen to the floor of a room in danger of being taken over by briars. To the side of the throne Burne-Jones painted a poppy, a symbol of illusion, sleep and death. The lines of the throne canopy, the courtiers' bodies, the folds of background drapery and the briar branches create a self-perpetuating circularity locking out any external intervention and possibility of restoration to life. *The Rose Bower* is an enlarged version of the 1871 *Sleeping Beauty* to which Burne-Jones added three maids asleep at the foot of the bed. The most interesting change is the position of the princess on her bed: slightly closer to a relaxed sleep than the previous princess, she begins the gradual sinking into deeper sleep that the following versions of the *Rose Bower* would bring to complete rest. The sleeping beauties of later years, including the one Burne-Jones painted in 1886–8 from his daughter Margaret, are oblivious of the prince, safe and forever beautiful and unclaimed in their protective bowers. Among the dead and the sleeping who populate the canvases, the princess alone is given a position concurrent with her state. Stretched and

34 Edward Burne-Jones, *The Briar Rose* (comprising three panels: *The Briar Wood*, *The Council Chamber* and *The Rose Bower*), (1871–3), Museo de Arte de Ponce, Puerto Rico.

shrouded on her bed, she is different from the unsuccessful knights and princes whose contorted bodies were exhausted in the fruitless quest. She is also different from the courtiers and maids overcome by magic at their work, as sleep does not appear to have interfered with her daily routine or caught her unawares. In this *Rose Bower* and its subsequent versions the princess appears withdrawn into sleep rather than overcome by it, as if her suspended life were not the effect, but the cause of the spell.

It is significant that the tale that inspired Burne-Jones to the end of his career was renamed *The Briar Rose* in 1871, a reminder of the young woman whom Ruskin loved. And even more significant is the fact that many of the changes Burne-Jones made to the series are linked to Ruskin's grief, reflected, in turn, in his own versions of sleeping beauties. Although this is a rather simplifying account, it is worth noting that after Ruskin's mention of Carpaccio's St Ursula, there followed in Burne-Jones's imagination a confused prince, a drugged-up king unable to protect his daughter and a princess sinking deeper into sleep, denied or refusing the sweet life-restoring kiss – and not very unlike Rose. Soon after Ursula, Ruskin rediscovered the virtues and appeal of another sleeping beauty, Ilaria di Caretto. He had already written about her tomb by Jacopo della Quercia in Lucca Cathedral in *Modern Painters* II (1846), but in 1873 Ruskin had new reasons to revisit the work (see Figure 8).



Figure 8: John Ruskin, *Tomb of Ilaria di Caretto*, 1874, pencil, watercolor and bodycolour. Ruskin Library, Lancaster University © Ruskin Foundation.

In the summer of 1872 he was briefly reconciled with Rose. He hadn't spoken to her for six and a half years. Rose did not reject him at first, and



his feelings for her reached a pitch of exaltation, until he convinced himself that there might be hope for their marriage. But his happiness did not last long, as they broke up again in September. In his despair, Ruskin chose to discuss the tomb of Ilaria di Caretto for his November 1873 Slade lecture at Oxford. By now he openly associated his private sorrows with the direction of his work, and it is clear that, as Rose withdrew from him in her wild, unsettled mind, he could only think of 'dead wild roses'<sup>35</sup> and princesses sleeping their last sleep, whom only God could awaken again. In the lecture Ruskin argued that della Quercia's work was superior because 'Quercia [...] has given humanity in its perfectness, accepting the glory of death.'<sup>36</sup> What Ruskin meant was that Ilaria is shown not merely as a dead body, but as someone who, through faith, will awake to afterlife following earthly death. According to Ruskin, della Quercia's skill lies in differentiating between mortal creatures, like the sleeping dog at Ilaria's feet, and transcendent ones, like Ilaria:

Between the cold severity which cannot reach the tenderness of death, and the vivid insolence which forgets its power, is placed this perfect tomb – a sacred portraiture of an infinite peace – laid, as it were, between the living and the dead – Christ's word spoken in perpetual marble: 'She is not dead – but sleepeth'. (Matthew. ix.24)<sup>37</sup>

Ruskin's fascination with the recumbent figure of Ilaria is a wishful projection of Rose. He longed for peace, and Ilaria appears as the portrait of 'infinite peace'. He knew that Rose's faith, although arid and narrow, would allay her fears of the end, and she would pass quietly into 'the glory of death'. And he continued to hope for the awakening of his Sleeping Beauty despite knowing it would be God who would claim her, and not himself. In the image he constructed of Ilaria in 1873, accompanied by his own drawing of the tomb, Ruskin sublimated all that Rose had come to represent for him.

35 See Hilton, *Ruskin*, 533; Ruskin was desperate for news of Rose and thought, rightly, that she was dying. He pleaded with friends for news of her 'because there is the dead wild rose always in my sight.'

36 Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 23, 222–3.

37 Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 23, 229–30.

Ruskin and Rose would not meet again until the autumn of 1874. By then Rose was dying. Although they renewed their talk of marriage, Ruskin knew Rose was slipping away and there was little he could do. But his desire for her and foolish hope that she could, somehow, still be his did not abate, even as he resigned himself that he could entertain no reasonable hope. He continued to refer to her in terms of the Sleeping Beauty tale, using Burne-Jones's name for the princess. In December 1874, as Rose departed for Ireland, where her mind finally collapsed and her body found eternal rest, Ruskin wrote to his cousin Joan:

I fear there is no hope of any help now for poor Sweet-briar; I have had much talk with her, & perceive her entire being to be undermined. [...] My poor briar-rose will only drop the blighted leaves, one by one.<sup>38</sup>

Having given up Rose on such terms, Ruskin was bound to try to find other meaningful tales, modified versions of the 'Sleeping Beauty', which, as 'part of the great firmament of the human mind' and 'essentially true' despite their changes,<sup>39</sup> could restore him to the faith that 'the maiden is not dead, but sleepeth.' In 1876, a year after Rose's death, Ruskin went to Venice to revisit the Carpaccio paintings and try to make sense of the legend of St Ursula (see Figure 9).

As he was copying Carpaccio's *Dream of St Ursula* and thinking of Rose, the saint seemed to him not only very realistically painted, but also very real. He wrote to Joan in September: 'There she lies, so real when the room's quiet – I get afraid of waking her! How little one believes these things, really! Suppose there is a real St Ursula, [...] – taking care of somebody else, asleep for me?'<sup>40</sup> It took very little for Ruskin the incorrigible dreamer to start re-casting himself as the prince before the sleeping St Ursula / Rose. By November 1876 he was so preoccupied with the saint that he recounted her legend in *Fors Clavigera* (1871–84). Ursula was the beautiful

38 Hilton, *Ruskin*, 583.

39 Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 19, 236.

40 The Ruskin Galleries, Bembridge, Isle of Wight, MS L 41, Ruskin to Joan Severn, Venice, 19 September 1876.

and wise daughter of a Christian king. Enthralled by her qualities, a powerful heathen king asks her in marriage. She thinks of the opportunity to convert the king and his people, so she agrees, but asks first for a three-year respite to go on a holy pilgrimage. On the way from Rome to the Holy Land she and her eleven thousand maiden followers are martyred for the Christian faith in Babylon – and so escapes the consummation of her



Figure 9: D. Gould, hand painted photograph of John Ruskin's copy of Carpaccio's *Dream of St Ursula*, 1877 © The Ruskin Collection, Museums Sheffield.

marriage. Ruskin would have found the parallels between Rose's story and St Ursula's congenial. He had asked Rose to marry him, and, like Ursula, she made him wait for three years. She also thought Ruskin 'heathen' because of his interest in myth, and died a martyr to her faith. Just before her death Ursula 'called her spouse to comfort and teach him';<sup>41</sup> in front of *St Ursula* Ruskin felt Rose was calling to him from the spirits.

So what comfort could Ruskin get from the story of a chaste and stubborn princess who died before she knew love? Ruskin had associated Rose with Proserpine since the mid-1860s. As he believed Ursula was a channel through which Rose spoke to him, Ursula came to avail herself, in his imagination, of the same powers of revival as Proserpine enjoyed. In fact, he had claimed as much in the November 1876 *Fors*, where he argued that Ursula's legend was also 'a Nature myth', repeated every spring,

in which Ursula is the Bud of flowers, enclosed in its rough or hairy calyx, and her husband, Æther – the air of spring. She opens into lovely life with 'eleven' thousand other flowers – their fading is their sudden martyrdom.<sup>42</sup>

By reinterpreting St Ursula's legend and bestowing on her vegetal regeneration powers, Ruskin gave himself another reason to believe that his maiden was not dead, but asleep. That winter Ruskin locked himself in a cycle of death and revival, sleep and awakening, loss and gain, through which he accounted for his virtual relationship with Rose / Proserpine / St Ursula. In his 1884 lecture on 'Protestantism: The Pleasures of Truth', Ruskin clarified even further the associations he had made among the beauties on whose strange sleep patterns depended his peace of mind:

No one knows who she is or where she lived. She is Persephone at rest below the earth; she is Proserpine at play above the ground. She is Ursula, [...] a type, perhaps, of the moss rose, or of the rose *spinosissima*, with its rough little buds. She is [...] in eternity, living everywhere, dying everywhere ...<sup>43</sup>

41 Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 28, 743.

42 Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 28, 733.

43 Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 33, 507.

Ruskin's solution to finding relative peace was to bring a cyclical dimension to the Sleeping Beauty tale. Thus his personal loss was turned into a natural truth which gave him scope to mourn publicly and imagine he could kiss Rose awake every spring, in a ritual refreshing of her memory. One way to do this was a renewed request<sup>44</sup> to Burne-Jones for a *Rape of Proserpine* in the spring of 1883 – the year that marks the last stop I make on the timeline of their friendship. 'Darling Ned', wrote Ruskin in February, 'if my *Proserpine* isn't begun, *please* begin it; and if it stopped, go on again; and if going on again, do a nice little bit as the Spring comes.'<sup>45</sup> Burne-Jones never actually painted such a picture, although he made at least two preparatory drawings. It is not clear what prevented him from completing the commission, but it certainly was not a lack of sympathy for his friend's sorrow, because in March 1883 Burne-Jones dropped everything to design a gold cross for Ruskin to give to the May Queen at Whitelands Training College for Women, in memory of Rose. That spring, though, something was troubling Burne-Jones in relation to the sleep-and-awakening motif which Ruskin asked him to revisit for his sake, and it was not something he cared to share with Ruskin.

There exists from this period a series of humorous drawings Burne-Jones made for a little girl, the daughter of his friends George and Elizabeth Lewis, called *The Artist Attempting to Join the World of Art with Disastrous Results*. The drawings show Burne-Jones in his customary 'artist' guise, very old and shabbily dressed. This hopeless *alter ego* does not discriminate between the literal and metaphoric, and in all seriousness takes energetic action where contemplation would suffice. Sitting on a painter's box, the 'artist' rests his head in his hands before a canvas covered in flower and branch motifs (No 1), an allusion to *The Briar Rose*. Next, the 'artist' stands between incomprehension and despair in front of the same canvas (No 2), then stares intently *into* the canvas rather than *at* it, as if an idea is beginning

44 It is not known when Ruskin first asked Burne-Jones for a *Proserpine*. The note in Burne-Jones's work record mentioning 'a design for Proserpine' in 1875 could equally refer to the initial commission or to his own emotional response to Rose's death.

45 Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 37, 437.

to take shape (No 3). He then tries to enter – literally – into the world he has created in paint, and steps through the canvas (No 4), only to fall, puzzled, to the floor on the other side (No 5).

Why was Burne-Jones unable to ‘enter’ his created world? Was not his art, as Ruskin had taught him – and often praised him for it – a reflection of natural law, and therefore an extension of the real world? It seems that, in this instance, Burne-Jones no longer cared to make his work concur with nature. *The Artist* drawings suggest that his pictures, or at least *The Briar Rose*, did not reflect the natural truth encapsulated by the wisdom of generations in the tale of awakening to love and life. By 1883 the Sleeping Beauty tale had ceased to have the same meaning for Burne-Jones as it did for Ruskin. It is possible that Burne-Jones did not finally give Ruskin a *Proserpine* because he had something different in mind, whose significance was closer to his own ideals. A short epistolary exchange with his friend later in the year offers a clue.

Burne-Jones counted among his closest friends the daughter of William Graham, friend and patron, and the owner of the small *Briar Rose*. Raised in a symbolic rose bower, among the kingly art possessions of her father, Frances embodied for Burne-Jones the perfect princess, a paragon of beauty and youth. He valued highly her friendship. He never ceased to write to her and confide in her till the end of his days, sharing with her trivial society gossip and more serious art-related matters alike. While still unmarried and living in her father’s house, Frances seemed forever within the reach of Burne-Jones’s friendship. But her engagement struck him as a personal threat to the routine of their letters and visits: Frances’s ‘prince’ had awoken her to love, was claiming her and would take her away from the safety of her rose bower. Burne-Jones had become so attached to Frances – or to the idea of her as a young beautiful companion – that her engagement left him battling with a sense of betrayal he had not completely overcome even a year later. His overreaction was fuelled by an interesting mix of emotions. On the one hand, he rehearsed a scenario he would act for real five years later, about the father losing his daughter to another man, through marriage. Although Frances was, so to speak, another king’s princess, Burne-Jones saw in her engagement what he was already dreading: the impending, natural loss of his daughter Margaret to her future ‘prince’. His reaction to

Margaret's engagement in 1888 was as possessive and difficult as his distress over Frances'. On the other hand, Burne-Jones liked to think of Frances as companion and muse; his reaction is therefore tinged, accordingly, with the bitterness required of the artist who does not only see himself deserted by his muse, but witnesses her fall from the Pantheon into the mundane. 'And now in the classic words of Mr. Swiveller', Burne-Jones complained to Ruskin, 'she has gone and married a market gardener'.<sup>46</sup> He is, of course, exaggerating, as Frances's marriage did not get in the way of her modest intellectual and artistic interests. But the exaggeration serves a different purpose from that of nursing wounded personal pride. Frances's engagement provided Burne-Jones with the factual grain which allowed him to mourn the transience of youth and beauty other than in the abstract, and meditate more credibly on the difference between the concept of beauty and its particular embodiments.

On Frances's engagement Burne-Jones wrote self-pityingly to Ruskin, seeking solace in his sympathy. He lamented that after cultivating Frances's taste and trying to please her with the fruit of his artistic labour, in the hope that she would stay true to the ideal he had built of her, she behaved merely human:

Sirens for her girdle, Heavens and Paradises for her prayer-books, Virtues and Vices for her necklace-boxes – ah! the folly of me from the beginning! [...]. Why didn't I make a girdle for *you*, and prayer-books, who would have really liked them [...]. Oh these minxes! You and I will yet build us a bower and have our mosaics which none of them shall ever see. And they don't understand, do they? Their eyes look depths of wisdom and beguile us and take us in – a sapphire will do as well to look into. We'll look into sapphires and moonstones, and paint pictures of the wretches, and laugh and be scornful yet.<sup>47</sup>

The letter, assuming a shared delight in beautiful things, speaks of Burne-Jones's wish to take refuge into the aesthetic as the only emotionally safe space. It expresses his disappointment that art, however hard he tried, can

46 Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, vol 2, 131.

47 The Burne-Jones archives, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, Burne-Jones to Ruskin, 15 March 1883.

have no bearing on reality. Frances may have been beautiful, inspiring and the recipient of Burne-Jones's treasured designs, but she was also subject to natural law, and when the time came she changed from revered maiden muse into an officer's wife. Although Angela MacCarthy suggests otherwise in her recent biography of Burne-Jones,<sup>48</sup> it is likely that Burne-Jones had no real quarrel with Frances's engagement and marriage – his only objection was to the impossibility of keeping Frances frozen in time, forever young, beautiful and unclaimed. 'Wretches,' he implies, can be beautiful and lead one to believe they are also good, true and constant, and those who confuse the ideal with its bodily manifestation will be disappointed. Using the example of his own imagined betrayal, Burne-Jones pleads with Ruskin for a separation of the aesthetic from the natural. The only 'safe' beauty is the aesthetic one, he argues, removed from the 'beguiling' association with goodness, and so from real life. Burne-Jones proposed to Ruskin an aesthetic alliance of the sages to enjoy a world of man-made beauty – 'mosaics' and 'sapphires' – in exchange for relaxing the fundamental tenet of his thinking, the meaningful goodness of natural beauty. But Ruskin was oblivious to the suggestions, and later in the year praised Burne-Jones in his lecture on 'The Mythic School of Painting' for exactly the opposite: embodying the natural and spiritual truth of myth in his work.<sup>49</sup>

Burne-Jones did not start work on the large *Briar Rose* series until the following year, but Ruskin's request of a *Proserpine* picture, *The Artist* drawings and Frances's engagement indicate that he was rethinking the tale. By 1883 *Sleeping Beauty* acquired a different significance for him: he wanted to show a princess who remains unclaimed, does not love, change, mature and die. 'I want it to stop with the Princess asleep, and tell no more' Burne-Jones is noted to have said, 'to leave all the afterwards to the invention and imagination of people, and tell them no more.'<sup>50</sup> Try as he

48 MacCarthy suggests that Burne-Jones was in love with Frances, and later made his feelings known to her. See MacCarthy, *Burne-Jones*, 405–10.

49 Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 33, 294–6.

50 Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, vol 2, 195.



might, though, his own princess, Margaret, did not remain asleep for as long as Burne-Jones would have liked. The news of Margaret's engagement to John Mackail in spring 1888 left Burne-Jones facing 'a short torment of jealousy'.<sup>51</sup> His correspondence and Lady Burne-Jones's recollections indicate that he had come to identify with the king of the sleeping palace and imagined Margaret was his little princess about to leave the safety of her rose bower to get married. The sense of loss Burne-Jones experienced is translated into his inability to rejoice at Margaret's awakening to love. On her engagement he wrote to his friend, the painter G.F. Watts, deploring his own failure to foil the ruse of Margaret's prince:

My little Margaret is engaged. I haven't felt very good about it – I have behaved better than I felt. She looks very happy, and before he wanted her, and before I dreamt of any such thing, I thought him a fine gentleman through and through, and yet, look what he has done to me! I have known him for seven years, and always he seemed a grave learned man who came to talk to me about books – and it wasn't about books he came, and now where am I in the story?<sup>52</sup>

'The story' can hardly be other than that of the king, father of Sleeping Beauty, who sees his daughter on the way to making her life outside the rose bower. 'Parental egotism', remarks Lady Burne-Jones, 'forgets in this letter even to mention the name of the man who was to marry his daughter', in true fashion of the sleeping king who does not know the intruder in his castle. To another friend, Burne-Jones complained that,

here is my darling Margaret on whom I depend for everything and without whom I should crumble into senility in an hour – and what has she done? Yes, what indeed, but engaged herself. And I wanted to write cheerfully about it and can't – I lose so much – and for a little while shall feel nasty and spiteful and grudging.<sup>53</sup>

The threat of getting older faster once the children have married, a feeling many parents experience, also looms over the king in the original tale. Life

51 Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, vol 2, 182.

52 Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, vol 2, 181–2.

53 Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, vol 2, 182.

resumes there with the arrival of the prince, who brings both awakening and death as part of the natural cycle. That Burne-Jones would 'crumble into senility in an hour' is, of course, an exaggeration, but also a ruse to place Margaret in the altered *Briar Rose* scenario and wish for life to stand still.

Ruskin's *Rape of Proserpine* remained un-painted. By 1886 he was in the grip of mental illness, but to Burne-Jones it was as if his friend's emotional and intellectual capacities had not diminished. He kept the friendship alive, penning his thoughts in a one-way flow of letters which he knew would never be answered, but which he needed to write, intimately, playfully, with even an air of conspiracy. In May 1886 he confessed that,

I have been writing incessantly to you, in a spiritual sense. [...] I often indite letters to thee when I work, and you are more and more in my life as time goes on.<sup>54</sup>

This shows that Burne-Jones did not simply ignore Ruskin's request and that his connection with his mentor was as strong as ever. But he was also thinking of his own impossible desires, which contradicted natural truth as Ruskin understood it. Free from the anxiety of upsetting his friend, Burne-Jones could now conceive a space of which he was himself master, where youth and beauty did not end in death, and Proserpine was forever safe from Hades. In 1890 he completed the 'large' *Briar Rose* series, consisting of four panels: *The Briar Wood* (see Figure 10), *The Council Chamber* (see Figure 11), *The Garden Court* (see Figure 12) and *The Rose Bower* (see Cover illustration).<sup>55</sup>

54 Burne-Jones to Ruskin, May 1886. See Helen Gill Viljoen, ed., *The Brantwood Diary of John Ruskin* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1971), 430.

55 Edward Burne-Jones, *The Briar Rose*, 1890, Buscot Park, Oxfordshire.



Figure 10: Edward Burne-Jones, *The Briar Wood*, first panel of *The Briar Rose* series, 1890, Buscot Park, Faringdon, Oxfordshire © Faringdon Collection Trust.

The 1890 *Briar Wood* version is larger and darker in palette than the 1873 one; in it the roses have lost the blush from their petals and the prince looks gloomier. In the tale, the prince is supposed to cut his way through the briars, in his relentless quest for the princess. By comparison, even the 1873 prince looks more eager and energetic than his 1890 replacement, a Hamlet-like figure who meditates instead of acting. He is also much taller, his head and feet having overgrown the canvas, as if to suggest a figure larger than life, contained and represented with difficulty. In Ruskin's reinterpretation of 'Sleeping Beauty' as St Ursula's story, the prince is in fact the angel of death. This may explain why the 1890 prince is dark, ghostly and inactive, as if overcome by a dilemma: to awake the princess and bestow on her love, marriage, consummation and death, or to let her forever keep her maidenly beauty and remain suspended in time, an archetype of youth rather than a princess following her natural royal path.



Figure 11: Edward Burne-Jones, *The Council Chamber*, second panel of *The Briar Rose* series, 1890, Buscot Park, Faringdon, Oxfordshire © Faringdon Collection Trust.

The 1873 *Council Chamber* is certainly recognizable in the 1890 version, which has in the meantime acquired a grander and more sophisticated feel. The tones have paled and gained a silvery, unearthly brilliance. The king is wearing his crown as opposed to the simple cloth cap of the previous version, and the poppy by the throne has changed into an hourglass, enhancing the artificial air of the picture. Another change from the 1873 version is the treatment of the floor. In both *The Council Chamber* and *The Garden Court* of the 1890 series, the floor is unnaturally polished. Like a mirror, it reflects the world of the enchanted castle back to itself, signalling self-containment and stagnation. The two other panels, *The Briar Wood* and *The Rose Bower*, are, by contrast, spared their own imprisoning reflection, as the source of their stasis is located in the choices the central figures make rather than in circumstances outside their control. The courtiers and servants appear thus under the spell of the wicked fairies, whereas the prince and princess seem to have colluded with them and acquired otherworldly attributes. Ruskin had once praised della Quercia for presenting Ilaria in the glory of transcendence, between death and resurrection. In the 1890 *Briar Rose* Burne-Jones shows the prince and the princess in the unnatural glory of stasis: he, unable to act; she, unwilling to wake up.



Figure 12: Edward Burne-Jones, *The Garden Court*, third panel of *The Briar Rose* series, 1890, Buscot Park, Faringdon, Oxfordshire © Faringdon Collection Trust.

*The Garden Court*, showing servant girls asleep at the well and at the loom, does not have a counterpart in the 1873 series. Its merits reside in its own gracefulness and its position as the third panel in the sequence, perfectly complementing the other three to give a sense of progressive peacefulness, from *The Briar Wood* with its darkly mysterious canvas to the serene lines of *The Rose Bower*. *The Garden Court* also serves to reinforce the difference in nature between the girls temporarily overcome by sleep and the princess in her strange, frozen stillness.

The 1890 *Rose Bower* is more peaceful than the 1873 one, and also sharper in detail and decoration. The tangled hair and amorphous shroud-cum-dress draping the princess's body are replaced with tidy hair and a clearly drawn body-defining dress, partially covered with a piece of cloth of the same colour, arranged to fall neatly in folds. The key note of the picture is arrangement: Burne-Jones shows us a princess too perfectly stretched out for sleep and too prettily turning her face away from the briar wood, otherworldly at peace. The roses, too, have changed, and no longer hang huge and ominous over the girls dressed in white and pink to mimic their petals. The 1890 flowers are smaller and merrier, and decorative rather than

foreboding; the sense of kinship between rose and princess, suggested in 1873 by the curve of her twisted body, is absent in 1890, as the princess is closer to describing the non-organic horizontals of the bed and the wall hangings rather than the curves of the living briar. The 1890 palette is considerably more luminous, which adds a celebratory note to the *Rose Bower* and distances it further from the hint of darkness and disquiet in its previous versions.

In this *Rose Bower* Burne-Jones takes symbolic charge over youth and beauty. Sleeping Beauty, safe from the prince's embrace, may celebrate eternal aesthetic life. Unlike Ursula, whom Ruskin associated with the annual vegetation cycle, a natural principle granting her revival each spring and condemning her as often to death, this princess doesn't love, but doesn't die, either. How much happier Ruskin could have been if he had resigned himself to loving Rose with the artist's eye alone, without seeking to become her prince!

The 1890 *Rose Bower* may be a special kind of St Ursula who does not marry and does not die, a hopeful glimpse of the country where the flowers do not fade,<sup>56</sup> but Ruskin could never have liked it. By breaking the natural cycle and denying the princess her awakening, Burne-Jones creates a counter-natural space which goes against Ruskin's lifetime work. *The Rose Bower* is a picture no longer based on natural law; it is a commentary on it, though, and it shows an artist able to manipulate natural law, change or annul it, and legislate independently for the artistic space. Instead of contemplating the transience of life, and mourning the fading of beauty, Burne-Jones chooses to intervene in the natural cycle. *The Briar Rose* does not reveal, as Ruskin wished for good pictures to do, the glory of God's creation in the natural world. The series opens a different, man-made world, where God is supplanted by the artist, a maker in his own right. *The Briar Rose* thus replaces Ruskin's mythologized sorrow at the maiden's descent

56 From Ruskin's letter to Susan Beever, a Brantwood neighbour and close friend, about Rose's death: 'My whole mind is set on finding whether there is a country where the flowers do not fade. Else there is no spring for me', Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 37, 193.

into Hades, a cycle of continual loss and hope of revival, with the artist's triumph as he holds Beauty in his power.

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ANNE CHASSAGNOL

## Nuptial Dreams and Toxic Fantasies: Visions of Feminine Desire in John Anster Fitzgerald's Fairy Paintings *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of* (1858)

'What visions can *she* have?' the waking man muses, as he turns her face towards him, and stands looking down at it. (...) 'What can she rise to, under any quantity of opium, higher than that! – Eh?'

— CHARLES DICKENS,  
*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, 1870

Sleep is a prevalent theme in Victorian paintings, which commonly focus on innocent childhood slumber. Examples of this genre include Benjamin Leader, *The Young Mother* (1856), Edmund George Warren, *Lost in The Woods* (1859), or J.E. Millais, *Sleep* (1867). In the nineteenth century, sleep provided a convenient motif to portray female submissiveness through passive descriptions of *ennui* and exhaustion. As a trope encroaching on the territories of nudity, sometimes obscenity, sleep is a subject that Victorian painters exploited. In the process, they subtly circumvented moral codes to depict enchanted realms, drawing upon mythological episodes, fairy tale or Shakespearean sources, while following the tradition of Renaissance dream-paintings. Few artists, however, offered a simultaneous representation of the sleeper and the content of his dreams, leading Fuseli to remark that: 'One of the most unexplored regions of art are dreams, and what may be called the personification of sentiment'.<sup>1</sup>

1 Henry Fuseli, *The Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli* (London: H. Colburn and R. Bentley, 1831), 145.

The vast majority of fairy artists tended to draw their inspiration from the Shakespearean corpus, especially *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Titania sleeping (Act II, scene ii) remains one of the most illustrated scenes of the fairy genre including versions from accomplished fairy painters such as Richard Dadd, Richard Doyle, Edwin Landseer, Robert Huskisson, John Simmons, and Joseph Noel Paton. Fairies are either depicted sleeping or as soporific agents. In that respect, Gustave Doré's *Queen Mab* (n.d.) points her wand towards the cradle of a baby commanding him to close his eyes while George Cruikshank (Queen Mab, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act I, scene v, 1860) illustrates Mercutio's speech in *The Tempest* in which the minuscule fairy queen is portrayed as a midwife inducing dreams of self-fulfilment while cavorting on the sleeper's nose.

John Anster Fitzgerald (1819–1906), a lesser known painter, constructs a type of fairyscape that is quite different from those provided by his contemporaries. Little is known about his background, let alone his career. His entomological fairies inherited from Bosch and Brueghel are to be found tightly enmeshed in dense foliage. When they are pictured outside their enchanted woods, they seem to instigate the dreams of the human figures. The subject of our attention, *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of*, actually refers to two paintings, which, in turn, are a complex synthesis of four of Fitzgerald's earlier works. *Dreaming* (n.d.), represents fairies supervising the sleep of a young lady slumped in an armchair. *The Captive Dreamer* (1856) invites the viewer to witness the secret meeting orchestrated by fairies between a knight in armour and a young lady who is tied to a tree in the company of a dragon. *Pipe Dream* (n.d.), is an opium-induced vision swarming with minuscule creatures that are puffed out of a pipe. *The Artist's Dream* (1857) is a self-portrait depicting Fitzgerald asleep on a chair next to a fairy. Each of these paintings provides a clue that might help deciphering *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of*.

Jeremy Maas argued that the two paintings known as *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of* originally bore the same title when produced in 1858. However, a note written on 19 November 2008 by Sotheby's for the sale of Sir David and Lady Scott's collection to the benefit of the Finnis Scott

Foundation suggests that one of the paintings originally had a different name:<sup>2</sup>

One of the two versions of the present subject, *The Dream After The Masked Ball*, was exhibited by Fitzgerald in 1858 at the National Institution. It may be confidently stated that the present painting (the one representing a sleeping lady in a Turkish embroidered jacket) is the exhibited work because it is the larger and more finished of the two compositions. The other version, which measures 25.4 by 30.4 cm, is in the collection of Andy and Susan Borowitz, and was included with the present painting in the Royal Academy exhibition Victorian Fairy Painting in 1997–8 (catalogue no. 38). Each of these two versions of the subject has customarily been entitled *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of* and it was under this title that the present picture was sold at Christie's in 1954.<sup>3</sup>

Both pictures represent the same sleeping lady, dressed in a luxurious costume, set against the same decor. At first glance, only the position of the sleeper and her costume differ (see Figures 13 and 14). The first painting (*The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of*) represents a young sleeping lady with her hand across a mauve fur mantle, while the second (*The Dream After The Masked Ball*) represents the same sleeping lady in an oriental open corset. Fitzgerald's diptych resists all levels of interpretation. What is this stuff that dreams are made of? To what extent can this painting be considered as a derivative version of *Sleeping Beauty*? What is the identity of the female sleeper? Are we to understand that she is surrounded by a fairy court? If so, what function do these attendants serve? What can we make of the scenario that unfolds on the left hand side of the canvas? Might it be interpreted as a premonitory dream? An abduction fantasy? An erotic vision? Or could it be the posthumous retelling of the sentimental journey of a *morte amoureuse* [a dead woman in love]? I would like to contend that this series of paintings encapsulates the complex Victorian attitudes to female

2 We will therefore refer to the first painting of the diptych featuring a young lady in a mauve mantlet adorned with a fur trimming as *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of*. The definitive version of the painting depicting a lady in an open Turkish jacket will be described throughout this paper as *The Dream After The Masked Ball*.

3 <<http://www.sothebys.com/fr/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.pdf.Lo8137.html/f/101/Lo8137-101.pdf>> accessed 1 October 2013.



Figure 13: John Anster Fitzgerald, *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of*, 1858, First version, Private collection © Bridgeman Gallery.

listlessness. By juxtaposing the image of a typical Sleeping Beauty with her visual fantasies, *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of* diptych transforms the bedchamber into a *camera obscura* refracting contradictory visions of femininity, by unveiling masculine expectations of feminine behaviour and by picturing sleep as an act of resistance and female empowerment. I would like to suggest that these paintings, drawing on various historical and literary sources, depict a nuptial ceremony, conveying a submissive image of Victorian femininity that is deconstructed by the drug-induced symbolism, thereby presenting a more liberated vision of sleeping beauties.



Figure 14: John Anster Fitzgerald, *The Dream After The Masked Ball. The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of*, 1858, Second version, Private collection © Bridgeman Gallery.

These paintings remain an enigma and, as such, their understanding can only rely on a series of inconclusive contentions. Dress code is the first enigma, for it is difficult to assess with absolute certainty the function the costume serves in this context, not to mention the event that the sleeping maiden might have attended. Some critics have referred to the Turkish style of the costume, others characterized it as theatrical attire.<sup>4</sup> In any event, whether she might be attending a ball or her own wedding, whether her body is

4 See Nicola Bown, *The Victorian Supernatural* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 166; Jeremy Maas, *Victorian Fairy Painting* (London: Merrell Holberton, 1997), 116–17 and Christopher Wood, *Fairies in Victorian Art* (Woodbridge: Antique Collector's, 2000), 104–5.

either dynamic or catatonic, the young lady in the painting is on display. Fitzgerald's paintings blur the lines between evening dress and wedding dress. The sartorial ambiguity at play in *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of* is based on the common characteristics both *toilettes* share: Victorian reception dresses were often made in pale colours as they were considered the best choice to suit the complexion while reflecting candlelight. It was common at the time to find white evening gowns, just as it became more fashionable to marry in white.<sup>5</sup> The bodice with the deep pointed waist was common to both attires and so were floral wreaths.<sup>6</sup> However, Victorian evening dresses and particularly ball gowns tended to be much more adorned with a variety of elaborate frills and ribbons. Most importantly, the invention of the crinoline in 1856 changed the female figure, which thereafter appeared heavily corseted at the waist while the lower part of her figure was hidden underneath various layers of under garments and heavily structured flounces of fabric. Taffetas, sheer or satin silk, were the most likely material for evening dress for they enhanced the swerving movement of the dancer but they do not correspond to the outfit the lady is wearing. The embroidered waistcoat and the garment of the gentleman appear to be consistent with a Stuart costume.

A number of details in the painting suggest a nuptial ceremony. After Queen Victoria's wedding in 1840, it became a custom for brides to wear white. Its role as an emblem of purity also signalled the wealth of the bride's family, as it was a particularly complex colour to manufacture. In both Fitzgerald's pictures, the central feminine character is wearing a white dress. Although it may be difficult at first glance to assess whether the lower part of her costume is part of a gown or simply a section of the bed cover, the scenography of the dream appears to depict the young maiden waltzing in the same white attire, therefore implying that the lower part of her costume is indeed a white dress.

The reclining figure in the short purple mantle in *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of* is wearing several pieces of jewellery, which is rare in fairy

5 Carl Haag, *Charlotte Viscountess Canning at Balmoral* (1853). Royal Collection.

6 F.X. Winterhalter, *Alexandra, Princess of Wales* (1864). Royal Collection.

paintings of the time. Her bracelets are particularly intriguing as they are consistent with the type of jewellery that was worn by brides on wedding ceremonies. Fitzgerald's paintings were executed in 1858, the year that saw both the establishment of British Crown Rule in India, and the nuptials of Queen Victoria's eldest daughter, Vicky, to Prince Frederick William of Prussia. The lure of the East played an important part in the selection of the jewellery at this wedding: among the wedding presents was a large necklace of oriental pearls. The Queen exhibited the famous Koh-I-noor diamond; and the bride was wearing a bracelet reproduced in a later painting of the ceremony, that closely resembles the bracelet of Fitzgerald's sleeping beauty.<sup>7</sup> In its aforementioned note, Sotheby's issued a statement referring to *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of* which is crucial to the understanding of the diptych. The truncated reference to *The Tempest* in the title assumes that the young lady is dressed up as Miranda, a young Shakespearean bride dreaming of eloping with a young cavalier at a masked ball:

The sleeping girl therefore imagines herself to be Miranda, dressed for her own wedding and with a crown of roses in her hair. This was perhaps the role in which she had that evening attended a masked ball, and the clothes that she still wears, having collapsed in exhaustion before she had undressed, are possibly intended as a costume that suggests the Shakespearean heroine. All around her bed, and in the air above her sleeping body, swarm myriad fairy creatures and hobgoblins as existed on the magic island, while above her appears a vision of herself and Ferdinand holding hands before the unseen figure of Prospero. In a more immediate sense, the subject of the painting is the dream of a young woman who has fallen in love and in which she sees herself standing hand in hand with that person at the moment before their first kiss (made permissible by the bunch of mistletoe beneath which they stand).<sup>8</sup>

7 'Marriage Presents To The Princess Frederick William of Prussia,' *The Illustrated News of The World* (1858), (n.d.). The diamond and emerald bracelet which was worn on the bride's left arm was given to her by her father and is mentioned in the edition of *The Times*, n°22901, 27 January 1858, 8. See also James Brooks, *The Marriage of The Princess Royale, 25 January 1858* (1894). Royal Collection.

8 <<http://www.sothebys.com/fr/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.pdf.Lo8137.html/f/101/Lo8137-101.pdf>> accessed 1 October 2013.

Sotheby's interpretation ties in all possible interpretations into one plausible narrative, that of a young Victorian lady impersonating a literary character whose fate and marital state are manipulated by fairy spirits.

The idea of sleep as a metaphor of the vegetative state of the virgin maiden maturing into adulthood before marriage features in a variety of fairy tales that Fitzgerald seems to combine in these two paintings. The dichotomy between an interior feminine space of enclosure that is disrupted by a masculine form of invasion is reminiscent of *Sleeping Beauty*, which remains an obsessive motif of female listlessness throughout the nineteenth century. As far as visual arts are concerned, the illustration of inanimate female bodies reflects the ambiguous posture of Victorian women who were pictured and maintained in a state of arrested development, depicted as inanimate frozen effigies (Frederic Leighton, *Greek Girls Picking up Pebbles*, 1871) while at the same time striving to break the mould imposed by Victorian patriarchy (Frederic Leighton, *Flaming June*, c.1895). John Anster Fitzgerald is not the only painter to have used the classical tale. In his own interpretation of the text, William Breakspeare (*The Sleeping Beauty*, n.d.) transfers its female protagonist to an oriental interior where she lays on a leopard skin, wrapped in flimsy gauzes, with her hair loose, thereby linking her to the tradition of the odalisque. Edward Burne-Jones displaces the main focus of attention in *The Rose Bower* (1890) by placing behind the sleeping lady a green drapery which seems to both contain the encroachment of nature and act as a screen onto which the desire of the princess may be projected. Finally, Daniel Maclise (*The Sleeping Beauty*, 1842) and Henry Maynell Rheam focus on the dramatic entrance of the prince. In all these versions, feminine sleep stands for a state of passive yearning or an ideal of fragility suppressing women's energy.

In *The Dream After The Masked Ball* and in *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of*, several elements of the décor, if not all, are evocative of the tale of 'Sleeping Beauty'. The opulent setting with its refined draperies and ruffled linens, the elaborate canopy bed that harks back to the tradition of royal bedsteads, and the rich costumes all point to an aristocratic interior, reminiscent of Princess Aurora's castle. The disposition of the room recalls Perrault's original text, which was translated by Robert Samber in 1729 and



alludes to a canopy bed ‘with its curtains drawn back’.<sup>9</sup> The diamond-shape panes of the mullion windows recall the impenetrable hedge of thorns. Nature surreptitiously pervades the locked interior of the bedchamber, which is wrapped in heavy layers of protective plush fabrics, through the foliage motifs embroidered in the curtains. The arabesque pattern on the dress coils round her body, thereby tying her to the bed, which becomes a symbol of her vegetative state. The predominant use of crimson red recalls the shedding of blood in the tale, which occurs when the princess pricks her figure on the distaff. In this respect, the lazy-daisy stitches embroidered on the lady’s *manchettes* in *The Dream After The Masked Ball* could easily be confused with bloodstains and refer to Sleeping Beauty’s curse. In *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of*, the crimson hue has been toned down and the only hint of red left is to be found in the red pin matching the lady’s ruby lips. The anachronistic outfits could be a reference to the wedding ceremony of Sleeping Beauty who eventually married in magnificent but dated clothes: ‘the prince refrained from telling her that her clothes, with the straight collar which she wore, were like those to which his grandmother had been accustomed. And in truth, they in no way detracted from her beauty’.<sup>10</sup>

For Bettelheim, Sleeping Beauty shares common features with another heroine who falls into a cataleptic sleep after succumbing to temptation: ‘The message is similar to that of “Snow White”. What may seem like a period of deathlike passivity at the end of childhood is nothing but a time of quiet growth and preparation, from which the person will awaken, mature, ready for sexual union’.<sup>11</sup> The midwinter atmosphere as well as the pale complexion of Fitzgerald’s sleeping maiden matches the description of Snow White, ‘who was as white as snow, and as red as blood, and her hair was as black as ebony.’ In the Grimm version, the seven dwarfs have her lain in a transparent coffin in which they can monitor her sexual maturation until

9 Christopher Betts, *The Complete Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 89.

10 Betts, *The Complete Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault*, 89.

11 Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment. The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Penguin, 1976), 232.

the arrival of the Prince and his attendants. Entrapped in a masculine web of conflicting desires, she is either commodified by the dwarfs, embalmed for all to see as a domestic icon ('she kept the house in order for them'), or she is preserved as the child-like wife-to-be. When the coffin is accidentally stirred by a protruding root on the path, causing the convoy to sway off its course, the dislodged poisoned slice of apple brings about the awakening of the heroine who is placed back on the right track, ready to assume her new marital status as a subservient wife. The combined sources of 'Sleeping Beauty' and 'Snow White' – to which we could add 'Cinderella' with the motif of the ball and the vanishing princess – compose a complex portrait of a young lady in Fitzgerald's paintings, one who suspends the course of time to fulfil her amorous dreams. The seven dwarfs attempt to regulate Snow White's maturation by casting her as the angel in their house and acting as constant buffer against temptations, while the seven goblins in Fitzgerald's paintings coax her into accepting different potions to prolong her sleep.

By contrasting the quiescent lethargy of his female sleeper and the stimulating content of her dream, Fitzgerald does not primarily focus on the sensation procured by her visions but speculates on their underlying potential causes. Dreams were the subject of much debate in the nineteenth century. As Nicola Bown argued, it

was not simply a question of whether dreams had a supernatural origin or not. On the contrary, theorists repeatedly discussed the origin of dreams in order to elucidate the relationship between mind, body, soul and spirit, and between our human consciousness and whatever supernatural forces or beings might surround us.<sup>12</sup>

Before 1860, numerous books had been published to explore the production of mental images, such as William Newnham's *Essays on Superstitions* (1830), Walter C. Dendy's *On the Phenomena of Dreams and Other Transient Illusions* (1832), Robert Macnish's *The Philosophy of Sleep* (1834), Mrs Blair's *Dreams and Dreaming* (1843), John Addington Symonds's *Sleep and*

12 Nicola Bown, 'What is the Stuff that Dreams are Made of?' in Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell eds, *The Victorian Supernatural* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 151–72, 159.

*Dreams: Two lectures* (1851), Reverend Thomas Millington's *Lecture on Dreams, Mesmerism, Clairvoyance* (1852). Different theories emerged exploring the analysis of mental images or the analysis of the most likely nocturnal disposition to produce dream-visions. Dreams did not fall in the remit of scientists exclusively: Dickens was highly interested in the subject and evidence suggests that he was well aware of the narrative potential of dreams in his fiction.<sup>13</sup> Fuseli, as an independent artist, essayist, professor at the Royal Academy and later Keeper of The Academy, was one of the painters who most influenced the Victorians. His dream paintings particularly have shaped the vision of his successors. Several of Fitzgerald's paintings bear the influence of the Swiss master: the composition of the *The Fairy's Funeral* (1864), for instance, is strongly evocative of *Ezzelin and Meduna* (1779). *The Dream of Belinda* (1789–90) could also have served as a source of inspiration for Fitzgerald as it depicts a scene taken from Pope's epic poem *The Rape of The Lock* featuring a reclining sleeping lady among sylphs who is about to be woken up from her dream by Ariel.

But the most obvious influence for Fitzgerald's sleeping beauties is Fuseli's iconic painting, *The Nightmare* (1781). The dark bed chamber with its red velvet curtains, the recumbent position of the central figure, her loose hair, the white gown and the glass phials on the nightstand are reproduced in Fitzgerald's diptych. The goblin, with a sinister grin on his face, sitting on the lady's dress is particularly evocative of Fuseli's incubus. A year before *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of*, Fitzgerald produced another picture whose composition and title (*The Nightmare*, 1857) directly allude to Fuseli's work. The scene painted in mauve nocturnal hues explores more explicitly themes found in *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of*. The helpless female sleeper is lying backwards in an interior similar to the one that is depicted in Fuseli's *Nightmare*: a knight is kneeling on her dress

13 See Warrington Winters, 'Dickens and The Psychology of Dream', *PMLA*, 63 (3), September 1948, 984–1006; Fred Kaplan, *Dickens and Mesmerism: The Hidden Springs of Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Catherine A. Bernard, 'Dickens and Victorian Dream Theory' in James Paradis and Thomas Postlewait, eds, *Victorian Science and Victorian Values: Literary Perspectives* (New York: Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, vol. CCCIX, 1981), 197–216.

while she is experiencing an attack of sleep paralysis. An ecstatic pastiche of Fuseli's *Nightmare*, *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of* does not explore the physicality of nocturnal distress but instead captures a state of overwhelming delight. The image of the sleeping maiden is captured as she is experiencing an episode of self-transcendence in which her body is literally displaced from her own self, duplicated on the left-hand side of the frame. The kidnapping, or rapt, within the dream, also functions as a semiotic allusion to the state of rapture that the sleeper experiences outside the dream. The disharmonious vibrations that the fairy band produces with drums and trumpets suggest a numbing sensation that eventually forces the body to surrender to hypnosis.

The gold embroidered fitted jacket is similar to jackets from types of national costumes found in Eastern Europe and could be Turkish, therefore shifting the focus towards the East.<sup>14</sup> The paintings' dominant crimson tones, evocative of the *papaver somniferum* or, opiate poppy, might indicate that the dream may be drug-induced, a suggestion that was not too far-fetched given that the paintings were exhibited in 1858 when Great Britain was in the midst of the second opium wars (1856–60). Laudanum, a tincture of opium usually mixed with sugar or cinnamon, was readily available in Victorian England and commonly prescribed as a painkiller to alleviate a wide variety of minor ailments such as menstrual cramps or migraines. The motif on the curtains of the bed reveals a pattern that resembles the *vitis vinifera*, a common grapevine that is known for its intoxicating properties. The leaves on the skirt of the sleeping lady are not specific enough to refer to a particular type of plant that the Victorian viewers would have been able to identify, however the convoluted shape of the foliage and their multiple ramifications may allude to the mental activity of the dreamer under the effect of laudanum. The allusion to narcotics has been toned down, in the exhibited piece, *The Dream After The Masked Ball*. The green Brueghel-like goblins seem to be the last remaining allusion to the very colour of the opiate plant. Among the superimposed fairy creatures,

14 I would especially like to thank Jenny Lister, Curator of Nineteenth-Century Textiles and Fashions at The Victorian and Albert Museum for providing invaluable help.

a goblin stands at the foot of the bed holding two glasses on a tray: one of which is presented to the sleeping lady, while a red fairy in the foreground appears to be drinking out of the second steaming cup. As Christopher Wood remarked:

One can only speculate what these fiendish potions might be, but they are clearly meant to imply that they are the cause of the girl's nightmares. [...] The use of drugs and opiates was unrestricted in Victorian times, and Fitzgerald is seeming to suggest that the goblins are luring her to an overdose, or even to take poison. The artist Rossetti was addicted to chloral, and his wife, Elisabeth Siddal, died from an overdose of laudanum, so there was no lack of parallels in real life for Fitzgerald to follow.<sup>15</sup>

The red necklace is one of few details that have been erased in the final version of the painting. Might it be a flower or a pin? or a corsage ornament? It is difficult to assess. Coral jewellery, however, was common among Victorian fashionable ladies: 'its heyday in Britain – particularly of the naturalistic strain, which preserved the spiky natural shapes of the coral forms – was the 1850s', according to Katharine Anderson.<sup>16</sup> The year preceding the exhibition of Fitzgerald's paintings corresponds to the publication of Ballantyne's *The Coral Island: A Tale of The Pacific Ocean* (1857). The red gemstone harks back to the classic tale of Charles Perrault, in which it is used to refer to Princess Aurora's flushed complexion: 'her cheeks were rosy pink and her lips like coral'.<sup>17</sup> Could Fitzgerald's Sleeping Beauty be wearing a necklace of coral, which was praised for the healing properties, or is it an amulet protecting its owner against the hallucinatory power of laudanum? This is not to say that the painting should be seen as a cautionary warning against opiate substances, Fitzgerald seems to have been very well versed in substance abuse as his *Pipe Dreams* suggests. Here, in *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of*, he explores the contiguous semantic relationship between Hypnos and Thanatos. The paintings could be interpreted as a *memento mori* representing a recumbent effigy lying in her shroud on

15 Christopher Wood, *Fairies in Victorian Art* (Woodbridge: Antique Collector's, 2000), 105.

16 Katharine Anderson, 'Coral Jewellery', *Victorian Review* 34 (1) (2008), 47.

17 Perrault, *The Complete Fairy Tales*, 86.

her deathbed, having succumbed to an overdose of laudanum. As Bram Dijkstra suggests, the sleep-death equation was fairly common in Victorian representation of women:

The fairy tale of sleeping beauty, too, inevitably came to be seen as symbolic of woman in her virginal state of sleep – her state of suspended animation and, as it were, death-in-life. [...] Indeed, portrayals of women whose obvious inanition seemed to prove that sleep was death and death was sleep became a source of endless delight among late nineteenth century painters. The trick was that they could be portrayed in this ultimate stage of passive sensuality with all the more impunity since, after all, they were only sleeping and not actually dead. At the same time, however, nothing could prevent the male viewer from indulging in the sleep-death equation and immerse himself, to virtually any degree of pleasurable morbidity, in thoughts of sensual arousal by a woman who appeared to be safely dead, and also safely beyond actual temptation.<sup>18</sup>

Evidence has suggested that flowers were commonly used as a prop in memorial photographs and that colour was added onto the cheeks to give the deceased a lifelike appearance.<sup>19</sup> The fact that she may be dead rather than alive does not fundamentally alter the painting's meaning. What matters here is that the contrast between two different types of visual narratives, the story of a sleeping young lady and the fantasies, reflect two contradictory ways of viewing the paintings.

At first, the painting appears to be an intimate *mise en scène* of Victorian masculine desires. The reclining lady is under the supervision of numerous masculine figures who have reconfigured the bedchamber into a theatre where the passive feminine body is displayed on a proscenium for all to see, as if it were a *tableau vivant*. Fitzgerald's painting bears the trace of the Victorian cult for female apathy, with its obsession for the invalid female body, as various elements, such as the phials, the nursing function of the goblins, the feverish cheeks of the sleeper, point to her weakness.

18 Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity. Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 62.

19 Stanley Burns, *Sleeping Beauty. Memorial Photography in America* (Santa Fe, NM: Twelvetreets Press, 1990). Jay Ruby, *Secure The Shadow. Death and Photography in America* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995).

Her drowsiness is not the only symptom of her subservience: the costume, and especially her underskirt, in the *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of* can barely be distinguished from the bedcover, suggesting that she might be bedridden.

Woman is the Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, Snow White, she who receives and submits. In song and story the young man is seen departing adventurously in search of a woman; he slays the dragon, he battles giants; she is locked in a tower, a palace, a garden, a cave, she is chained to a rock, a captive, sound asleep: she waits.<sup>20</sup>

In any case, her confinement operates on an aesthetic level: the system of curtains, and the covers that are advantageously wrapped around her body present her as another commodified piece of decoration in this highly decorated room. The female subject is but a decorative *assemblage*. As Jan Marsh contends in *The Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood*, 'they become passive figures rather than characters in a drama (...). They are reduced to an aesthetic arrangement of sexual parts for male fantasies'.<sup>21</sup> The viewer is distracted by the numerous pieces of jewellery and elaborate fabrics that adorn the body and eventually shift the focus away from her physique. The sleeping lady therefore functions as a tailor's dummy expected to do no more than to display clothes in the most flattering manner. At the height of the industrial revolution, women's toilettes were often read as an indicator of their family's wealth. In this respect, under the pretence of depicting a fairy scene, Fitzgerald pays a vibrant homage to the most elaborate textiles that the Victorian era produced, both in terms of colour and texture. The lady's clothes merge into the highly decorated room, making it difficult to distinguish between her dress and her blanket. Her clothes mirror her social status, that is to say, that of a woman destined to rule over her household.

Fitzgerald's diptych discloses a complex system of voyeuristic attitudes that reveal a fetishist reading of the female body, which is only partially visible through her accessories. Her body is an assemblage of frills and frocks that vary from one version of the painting to the next in which the viewer

20 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Bantman Books, 1970), 271–2.

21 Jan Marsh, *The Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood* (London: Quartet, 1985), 145.

is encouraged to compare her outfit, to dress and undress the sleeper. The series of *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of* plays with the scopophilic tendencies of the beholder, as his irresistible urge to view the female body is exacerbated by the desire to feel the fur on the lady's mantlet and to stroke her hair. In fact, all the elements of the décor in the bedroom ask to be manipulated: the viewer is almost invited to open or shut the windows, one can hardly resist drawing the curtains or touching the velvet cover of the chair. The sense of eroticism that emerges from this scene relies on the discrepancy between the multiplication of layers and the deficit of flesh. For Barthes, eroticism lurks in invisible folds of the garments: 'Is not the most erotic portion of the body were the garment gapes?'<sup>22</sup> It is not clear whether the forearms that reveal rare sections of flesh are supposed to arouse the curiosity of the viewer or if they are simply left bare to better display the bracelets she is wearing on both wrists. Her body reads like an erotic map orientated towards four cardinal positions represented here by four goblins guarding four erogenous zones: a translucent fairy creature is superimposed on her bosom, another sits on her hip, a third one stands by her ankle, while the fourth sits on her hair.

Although the sleeping maiden in these paintings cannot elude the masculine gaze, one can wonder if female sleep does not operate as a system of resilience that manifests itself via passive exhibitionism.<sup>23</sup> Contrary to the classical tale, Fitzgerald's sleeping beauty does not wait to be woken up by a valorous prince, on the contrary, she puts herself on display and, in her dream sequence, she conjures up a masculine figure with whom she is seen eloping. The dream would have probably featured a kissing scene under the mistletoe, had she not been whisked away by the goblins. Unlike Princess Aurora who is represented as a victim of time, who has to wait a hundred years in a state of lethargy, Fitzgerald's sleeping lady is the keeper of time as her jewellery indicates in *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of*. It

22 Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of The Text* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 10.

23 Sigmund Freud, 'Jokes and Their Relations to The Unconscious' (1905) in James Strachey, ed., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Work of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953–75), vol. 8, 98.



is difficult to determine with precision the type of bracelets she is wearing as a close analysis fails to provide enough detail but, interestingly enough, the clasp bracelet on her right hand resembles a watch. Jewellery is rather understated in Victorian paintings, which is puzzling given the Victorian obsession for details. Jewellery, just as flowers, function as a linguistic code of their own. As Charlotte Gere suggests:

the many different codes and messages used in sentimental exchange. Trinkets of little or no value – a jet brooch, a locket enclosing a portrait or hair, a ring with a particular combination of stones or a bracelet of plaited hair – hold a whole world of information. Armed with knowledge of the language of the material, motif, and design, of gem-lore, flowers and the cult of hair work, even at this distance of time, the modern observer can recover much of the symbolism behind Victorian Jewellery. Contradiction between monetary worth and personal significance were resolved by using jewels' moral and spiritual meaning.<sup>24</sup>

Victorian ladies commonly wore fob or pocket watches; wristwatches, however, were much more unusual. When they were worn, it was difficult to identify the bracelet as being a watch, as the dial was often hidden by a hinged panel or a plaque.<sup>25</sup> The first ladies' wristwatch was made in 1810 by Abraham Breguet for the Queen of Naples; and, at the time, these heavily adorned watches were mostly intended as a decorative item in their own right.<sup>26</sup> However, the shape of the bracelet of the sleeping lady in Fitzgerald's

24 Charlotte Gere, and Judy Rudoe, *Jewellery in The Age of Queen Victoria: A Mirror to The World* (London: British Museum Press, 2010), 153.

25 I am particularly grateful to Richard Edgcumbe from the Metalwork Collection at The Victoria and Albert Museum in London for sharing his knowledge on Victorian jewellery and for referring me to Charles Oman, *Victorian and Albert Museum Catalogue of Rings, London, 1930* (Ipswich: Victorian and Albert Museum Press, 1993). I am also indebted to Karla Vanraepenbusch from Le Centre d'Etude Institut L'homme et le Temps at the Musée International d'Horlogerie in La Chaux-de-Fonds for attracting my attention to Sylvie Béguin's article 'Naissance et Développement de la montre-bracelet : histoire d'une conquête (1880–1950)', *Chronométrophilie*, 37, 1994, 33–43.

26 I would like to thank Adam R. Harris, the guest curator of wristwatches at the National Watch and Clock Museum (Columbia, USA), for his helpful comments on Victorian wrist watches.

painting *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of* recalls the calatrava cross which became the emblem of a Swiss manufacturer: 'in 1868, Patek Philippe & Co created a watch bracelet for countess Koscowicz of Hungary based on early designs presented at the Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851. [...] Patek Philippe claim to have made the first wristwatch.'<sup>27</sup> This exceptional piece of jewellery was wound with a key. The firm attracted considerable attention when Queen Victoria purchased a keyless blue pocket watch incrustated with diamonds during the Exhibition. These watches were obviously manufactured for the most prestigious royal figures, which also is consistent with the identity of Fitzgerald's lady in *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of* who is supposedly the daughter of the exiled duke of Milan. The idea that she might be wearing a watch, possibly even two, one on each wrist, no longer presents her as the victim of a sleeping spell. On the contrary, in her dream saturated with erotic undertones she seems to command the duration of her hallucinatory adventures based on four times – wooing, waltzing, kissing and departing – while her other timepiece, on her right wrist, which is much more mundane and similar to a bracelet clasp with a ribbon band measures the passage of time within the room. The portrait of a lady that Fitzgerald represents transgresses the Victorian codes of conduct. Her costume is rather unusual in that it conceals the body rather than enhances its hourglass figure, leaving the body less constrained. The loose shape of her dress with its soft pleats made in a heavy material does not seem to match the domed crinolines that appeared in 1856 in London, just two years before the paintings were completed. Was Fitzgerald an advocate of the Aesthetic Movement in fashion? Was he part of the crusade to reform the masquerade of fashion by liberating the female body from impractical attire and excessive frills? The painting echoes William Morris's statement: 'No dress can be beautiful that is stiff, drapery is essential' and displays a more liberated feminine figure.<sup>28</sup>

27 Genevieve Cummings, *How The Watch Was Worn. A Fashion For 500 Years* (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 2010), 231.

28 William Morris cited by Alison Adburgham, *A Punch History of Manners and Modes* (London: Hutchinson, 1961), 134.

In *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of*, Fitzgerald represents a sleeping beauty who is no longer a recluse. She no longer depends on a masculine antidote to reverse the spell. As her enigmatic smile might suggest, she is not the consenting victim she might be thought to be. The extended period of catalepsy is, in this fairy painting, a constructive phase of femininity, a period of quiet preparation for female fulfilment during which the simple act of being female is idealized.<sup>29</sup> Fitzgerald's Sleeping Beauty, who is supposedly a representation of Miranda becomes the object of an inescapable specular activity: as the onomastics suggests, the name Miranda derives from the latin *mirandus*, meaning admirable and, as such, Miranda is meant to be admired and as such remains for all to see as a feminine relic. However, Fitzgerald invites the viewer into the intimacy of the bedchamber to reveal an alternative proto feminist version of the tale suggesting that the sleeping maiden can also foster her own masculine fantasies. By superimposing two different visions, that of a dreamer and that of her dream, the paintings offer contradictory readings, depending on whether they are seen from the lady's perspective or from the viewer's vantage point. As Bettelheim suggests in *The Uses of Enchantment*, 'whether it is Snow White in her glass coffin or Sleeping Beauty on her bed, the adolescent dream of everlasting youth and perfection is just that: a dream'.<sup>30</sup> *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of* should remain a dream and as such lend its ways to multiple possible interpretations as Fitzgerald depicted here a feminine romance of many dimensions. His painting resists interpretation and remains a fairy fantasy as '[h]e was known as "Fairy Fitzgerald" from the fact that his work, both colour and black-and-white, was devoted to fairy scenes, in fact his life was a long *Midsummer Night's Dream*'.<sup>31</sup>

29 Madonna Kolbenschlag, *Kiss Sleeping Beauty Good-Bye. Breaking The Spell of Feminine Myths and Models* (New York: Doubleday, 1979), 134.

30 Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, 234.

31 Harry Furniss, *My Bohemian Days* (New York: Stokes, 1919), 116.

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MARIE CORDIÉ-LEVY

## Julia Margaret Cameron's Sleeping Beauties

When he received Julia Margaret Cameron's photographs, Victor Hugo exclaimed:

How can I thank you enough madame for this new kindness? You overwhelm me. All of them are beautiful, not one of the photographs but is in itself a masterpiece. No one has ever captured the rays of the sun and used them as you have; I throw myself at your feet.<sup>1</sup>

What was it that moved Victor Hugo so much, was it just a question of sunrays? Why did he consider the photographs as masterpieces? Was it because Julia Margaret Cameron understood that photography was not just a scientific activity but a 'mortal yet divine art',<sup>2</sup> as she put it?

Before focusing on some of her portraits, more especially those of the reclining sleepy kind, such as *The Day Spring* (1865), *Pre-Raphaelite Study* (1870), *Alethea* (1872), *The Parting of Lancelot and Guinevere* (1874), some biographical elements will shed light on her extraordinary personality.

Julia Margaret Cameron was the fourth of ten children of Adeline de L'Etang, a French aristocrat and James Pattle, an English official of the East India Company, who lived in Calcutta. To avoid contracting the local Indian diseases, Julia was sent at an early age to Versailles to stay with her French grandmother and remained there throughout her youth, playing in the palace's gardens. When she returned to India, the Pattle sisters

1 Helmut Gernsheim, *Julia Margaret Cameron, her Life and Photographic Work* (London: Aperture Monograph, 1975), 67.

2 J.M. Cameron assembled an album for her friend and mentor the painter George Frederic Watts (1817–1904) in February 1864 and offered it with these words: 'my first success in my mortal but yet divine! art of photography.'

were so different from other girls that William Makepeace Thackeray, who had fallen in love with one of them, had called their world *Pattledom*.<sup>3</sup> In 1838, the witty Julia married Charles Hay Cameron, a lawyer, humanist and owner of a tea plantation in Ceylon, and returned to India to fulfil her duties as hostess, manager of her household and soon mother of five. After her husband's retirement for medical reasons, the family came back to England, moved to different places before finally settling in Freshwater, in the Isle of Wight, on a property called Dimbola.

In 1863, at the age of 48 and after a period of depression, she received her first camera from her daughter Julia and her son-in-law Charles Norman. Thanks to the help of her friend, John Herschel, she took a great fancy in it and quickly grasped the founding elements of the photographic technique consisting of wet collodion glass plates printed on albumen paper. With her 11" × 9" and later 15" × 12" camera (she used the second one after 1866), she took pictures of the 'famous' friends that she had met at her sister Sara Prinsep's salon, in Kensington, London: poets Robert Browning, Henry Longfellow and Alfred Tennyson; astronomer John Herschel; theorist Charles Darwin; social critic Thomas Carlyle; and her mentor, the symbolist painter George Frederic Watts. Wearing a long red velvet dress, she would welcome them with a cup of tea at the door of Dimbola.

When I have such men before my camera my whole soul has endeavoured to do its duty towards them in recording faithfully the greatness of the inner as well as the features of the outer man. The photograph thus taken has been almost the embodiment of a prayer.<sup>4</sup>

Because the family was in dire straits, and even though she kept on considering herself as an amateur, she acted like a professional photographer,

3 Julian Cox and Colin Ford; with contributions by Joanne Lukitsch and Philippa Wright, *Julia Margaret Cameron: the Complete Photographs* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Trust, 2003), 13.

4 Julia Margaret Cameron, 'Annals of My Glass House' [1890], in Beaumont Newhall, ed., *Photography, Essays and Images: Illustrated Readings in the History of Photography* (New York: Museum of Modern Art; Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1980), 135–9, 135.

trying to earn a living by selling her prints via P. and D. Colnaghi, Bond Street, one of the leading galleries in London.

Her most inventive work is the one she did with women. Beside the close shots of women looking upwards like the sensual masterpieces *Call I Follow, I Follow. Let Me Die* (1867) and *The Kiss of Peace* (1869) or women looking in the distance like *Beatrice* (1866); beside the most praised medium shots of Alice Liddell in *Pomona* (1872), or the strikingly modern series of portraits of her favourite niece, the beautiful Julia Prinsep Jackson, taken before her first marriage to Mr Herbert Duckworth,<sup>5</sup> J.M. Cameron also produced four portraits of the reclining kind that we will now analyse, using the tactile micro-analysis inspired by art historian Alois Riegl and historian Carlo Ginzburg.

### *The Day Spring, also Called Madonna with Child, 1865*<sup>6</sup>

In this first close shot, we can see a woman leaning over a young child lying in the foreground on a couch covered with leaves and flowers symbolizing purity. Her hair is hidden under a headdress and her shoulders are wrapped in a sort of antique toga. Her lowered eyes express serious concern and tender affection. The delicate lighting falling on the naked child's arm and the blurred reclining body of the woman recall Rembrandt's technique with its greyish chiaroscuro and soft focus.

The title *The Day Spring* directs the reader's mind towards an idealized vision of Pre-Raphaelite rebirth while the religious title, *Madonna with Child*, evokes the Tractarian influence on the photographer, who according

5 Julia Prinsep Jackson was also the mother of Virginia Woolf – and the actual Mrs Ramsay in 'To the Lighthouse'.

6 The photograph discussed here is titled *The Shadow of the Cross*. It is another version of *The Day Spring*, taken with the same models in the same position but with a slightly different background. It belongs to the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

to Mike Weaver regarded her photographs as theophanies, manifestations of God in terms of living persons.<sup>7</sup>

How did J.M. Cameron perform this scene? Because she had run out of ‘famous men’, she had to turn to ‘fair women’ to use Virginia Woolf’s expression. And where could a Victorian woman of stature find them but in her family circle, her own domesticity – six people were working for her – and among the local workers or children? Roger Fry accounts for it as follows:

Pre-Raphaelitism has leavened the cultured society of the day with an extraordinary passion for beauty. The option of beauty which was obtained had in it always a streak of affectation; it was imbued with a tremendous self conscious determination. The devotees of this creed cultivated the exotic and precious with all the energy and determination of a dominant class. With the admirable self assurance which this position gave them, they defied ribaldry and flouted common sense.<sup>8</sup>

J.M. Cameron’s muses were most of the time young: Mary Hillier was seventeen when she modelled for *The Day Spring* and Kate Keown, the daughter of a local soldier, was merely ten when she sat for a *Study of the Cenci*. Cameron made them pose in front of the camera, creating artistic performances fashioned after amateur theatricals Victorians were fond of. Indeed, after converting the house’s hen coop into a studio, she carried out further transformations: with ‘a Christian poetic determination’<sup>9</sup> in the words of Mike Weaver, and probably inspired by Guido Reni’s engraving of a pietà, J.M. Cameron did not hesitate in establishing analogies between types which allowed to understand feelings from a religious viewpoint. Taking the New Testament for granted, she transformed Archibald, her grandson into a little Jesus and Mary Hillier, her parlour maid, into the Virgin Mary so that the local people started calling her Mary Madonna. J.M. Cameron’s sentence, ‘men are great through genius, women are great

7 Mike Weaver, *Whisper of the Muse, the Overstone Album and Other Photographs by Julia Margaret Cameron* (Malibu: J. Paul Getty Press, 1986), chapters 2 and 3.

8 Roger Fry, quoted in Gernsheim, *Julia Margaret Cameron*, 76.

9 Weaver, *Whisper of the Muse*, 23.



through love',<sup>10</sup> takes its full meaning: Mary Hillier, as a maid trying to take good care of little Archie, is a Madonna whose reserved generosity is still as uncertain as Archie's naked sleepy abandonment is subversive for the time. Under the apparent moral didacticism of this idealized motherly love – or *Madonna Addolorata* – lies the delicate reality of uncertain surrogate love that J.M. Cameron herself put into practice (she adopted five children and a foster child). But life is sometimes ironically cruel. Mary Hillier would eventually have to take good care of Archie when Julia, J.M. Cameron's daughter, died in 1873 while giving birth to her sixth child.

To conclude, even if the models are still devoid of the plasticity of her later works, as Margaret Harker suggests,<sup>11</sup> because of the still uncertain use of her short focal length and of lighting,<sup>12</sup> this first picture of the reclining kind remains touching in its incompleteness and in the discrepancy between J.M. Cameron's religious aspiration and the reality of her model's surrogate feelings. It settles in a subdued way what will later make J.M. Cameron's success and signature: the dreamlike mood, the proximity of her model and the delicate subversive sensuality, with the boy's naked body touching the model's arm.

### *Pre-Raphaelite Study, 1870*

Taken with her larger 15" × 12" camera, this photograph asserts the goal of its title: it aims at rivalling the favourite dramatic intensity of the Pre-Raphaelites. Eighteen-year-old May Prinsep, the daughter of J.M. Cameron's sister Sara,

10 Julia Margaret Cameron, in a letter, 'Annals of My Glass House', 138.

11 'At the beginning she was uncertain of how to use lighting to advantage and several of the portraits she took in 1864–6 lack the plasticity of her later work'. Margaret F. Harker, *Julia Margaret Cameron* (London: William Collins Sons & Co., 1983), 7.

12 Cameron used 'a lens with such short focal length that only a small region of the sitter would be sharp' Mary Warner Marien, *Photography, A Cultural History* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2002), 158.

is her model here. Adopted at the age of eleven, she was appreciated by J.M. Cameron for her classical beauty that suited 'Italian' characters such as Beatrice. But once again, her name as a sitter is not mentioned because, as Mary Warner Marien notes, 'women didn't have the identity and authority in the cultural and intellectual world enjoyed by men such as Darwin, Herschel and Tennyson'.<sup>13</sup> This picture reminds us of James Abbott McNeill Whistler's *Symphony in White N°3*<sup>14</sup> in many ways: first the photographer focuses on how the white dress with its delicate airy cotton fabric is pleated by the belt around the model's breast and body. The long rosary, because of its sacredness, restrains her sensuality, while the bangles at her wrist add elements of sophistication. Her reclining head and the blurred background convey the melancholy of her dreams. If J.M. Cameron considered this study as 'Pre-Raphaelite', it is probably because its composition and pose are in keeping with an allegorical trope that George Frederic Watts, the painter who 'gave [her] wings to fly with',<sup>15</sup> as she said, would have loved.

But while Whistler's aesthetics had a Japanese-inspired touch, the deliberate positioning of J.M. Cameron's model in the corner of the frame creates a feeling of oppression. The shawl falling from the model's hip adds a dark touch and May's sulky look and determined gesture seem to refuse any empathy with the onlooker. Considering the time it took J.M. Cameron to reach the right shot (sometimes a whole afternoon), this portrait of an unwilling and objectified May whose artificial pose lacks a radiating vision may have been deliberately chosen by the photographer for one purpose: to show the limits of a young woman's dreams in Victorian times. How could she know if the man of her dreams was the right one?

13 Warner Marien, *Photography, A Cultural History*, 158.

14 James Abbott McNeill Whistler's *Symphony in White N°3*, 1866.

15 J.M. Cameron, quoted in Margaret F. Harker, *Julia Margaret Cameron*, 57.

*Alethea*, 1872

In this masterpiece, J.M. Cameron has at last reached 'the Sublime and the Beautiful', to use the title of her husband's essay. Let us look at Margaret Harker's description:

The association between her head and shoulders and the lace cap and hydrangeas (hortensia) and camelia foliage against which she is standing is fascinating. The interplay between sharpness and diffusion of definition in the image is most effective with a finely delineated profile, hair flowing like softly running water and flowers revealed in detail without being obtrusive.<sup>16</sup>

For this photograph (see Figure 15), J.M. Cameron asked twenty-year-old Alice Liddell, the model of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, to sit for her. In this Ophelia-like portrait of a young woman, some elements stand out: the Greek name Alatheia, the pose of the model and the oval frame. The Greek title appears as a touch of Pre-Raphaelite sophistication, as if J.M. Cameron aimed at addressing the happy few who were literate enough to know the true meaning of the word. In the first Greek-English lexicon published in 1843 by Henry George Liddell, the father of Alice, 'Alatheia' is listed as meaning 'true, sincere, truthful, frank, honest, real and actual'.

In 'Annals of My Glass House', J.M. Cameron wrote: 'I longed to arrest all beauty that came before me, and at length the longing has been satisfied'.<sup>17</sup> In a society that considered loose hair as a 'certain glorious looseness of morals',<sup>18</sup> as Mike Weaver says, this portrait of a woman with long flowing

16 Margaret F. Harker, *Julia Margaret Cameron*, 58.

17 Julia Margaret Cameron, 'Annals of My Glass House' in Beaumont Newhall, *Photography: Essays and Images*, 135.

18 Mike Weaver, *Whisper of the Muse*, 40: 'It was metaphorically appropriated in the Victorian period to suggest a certain glorious looseness of morals. Child-bride that she was, Ellen Terry although married to Mrs Cameron's friend G.F. Watts, was not allowed to let her hair loose upon her shoulders in company. Mrs Cameron, along

hair thus asserts implicitly the existence of a *living* feminine desire that will be even more obvious in *Pomona* made that same year.



Figure 15: Julia Margaret Cameron, *Alethea*, 1872 © The Royal Photographic Society Collection / National Media Museum, UK.

Why did J.M. Cameron make Alice pose as if she were dead, with her objectified ‘finely delineated profile’ in a frame reminding us of Edgar Allan Poe’s story, *The Oval Portrait*,<sup>19</sup> in which a painter’s model dies for

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with Charles Dickens, felt that long hair made women beautiful, even if it did make them metaphorically loose.’

19 Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Oval Portrait* is a short story first published in *Graham’s Magazine* in 1842.

having posed too long in a cold tower? Did she wish to show how lethal beauty is when it is reduced to the only alternative to dowry and heritage in the quest of a husband? The answer may be given by Jean Clair, for whom beauty is mourning's comfort:

L'appréhension de la beauté serre le coeur, comme apprendre un deuil intime. Elle est la manifestation d'un désastre, autant que d'une perfection. Or c'est ce même sentiment de deuil qui nous pousse à rechercher le réconfort de la beauté. Un même mouvement nous fait donc saisir dans la beauté le voisinage de la mort et dans la mort le nécessaire recours à la beauté.<sup>20</sup>

[The apprehension of beauty breaks your heart, just as when you learn about the death of a close friend. It is the manifestation of a disaster, as well as that of perfection. But it is this exact same feeling of mourning which urges us to find comfort in beauty. The same movement makes us seize the presence of death in beauty and the necessity of beauty in death.] (my translation)

There may be a metaphorical interpretation of Alethea's pose, of her Greek name and of the oval frame. If we remember that the major characteristic of nineteenth-century photography is truthfulness, and how J.M. Cameron scorned these multiple stereotypical photographs called *carte de visite* invented by Disderi, this portrait could be considered as a clear-sighted *mise en abyme* of her 'mortal yet divine art' which redeems beauty killed by the 'truthful' treatment of scientific photography.

### *The Parting of Lancelot and Guinevere, 1874*

In this last picture of the reclining kind, J.M. Cameron aims at illustrating Tennyson's poem: *Idylls of the King*, inspired by the Arthurian legends in which Queen Guinevere has a love affair with Lancelot, a younger man,

while Arthur is away on the battlefield. At the end of the poem, she redeems her sin by recognizing the superiority of her husband over her lover.

To succeed in this project of a pseudo-medieval series of photographs commissioned by Alfred, Lord Tennyson in 1872, J.M. Cameron gave her best by investing her own money in the renting of armours used for the theatre. The volume of photographs was published by Henry S. King in 1875 in London. For this particular picture, Cameron apparently asked Mrs Hardinge, the daughter of the first viscount Harding of Lahore whom Mr Charles Hay Cameron had been working for in India, to pose as Guinevere and she asked Mr Read, a porter at the local Yarmouth pier whom she considered suitable, to pose as Lancelot.

Here, Queen Guinevere in a white dress is still wearing her ring but is allowing herself this subversive gesture: she is resting her head against Lancelot's breast. The metallic coat of mail contrasts with the expression of total abandonment of the two tragic lovers. Their final embrace before they part forever seems to correspond to these stanzas:

And Lancelot ever promised, but remain'd,  
 And still they met and met. Again she said,  
 'O Lancelot, if thou love me get thee hence.'  
 And then they were agreed upon a night  
 (When the good King should not be there)  
 To meet  
 And part forever. Passion-pale they met  
 And greeted; hands in hands, and eye to eye,  
 Low on the border of her couch they sat  
 Stammering and staring: it was their last  
 Hour,  
 A madness of farewells.<sup>21</sup>

In this photograph, J.M. Cameron gives her imagination full power through the creation of an appropriate atmosphere. She also succeeds in presenting a scene of sensuous passion in which the dignity of repressed desire is

21 Alfred Tennyson's *Idylls of the King and Other Poems*, written in 1859 was published in 1874–5.

shown with a heart-rending depth of perception. The energy of despair of the two lovers may open a window into J.M. Cameron's soul. One year later, J.M. Cameron had to part with all her photographic projects for financial reasons. She had to leave England and go back to India where she died in 1878 without producing pictures of great interest anymore.

To conclude, those four sleeping beauties are exceptional in photographic Victorian portraits. Using both Mike Weaver's analysis of Julia Margaret Cameron's 'Divine art' and Federica Muzzarelli's<sup>22</sup> approach to her talent for 'performance', our micro-analysis has concentrated on her 'mortality'. It has allowed us to show how, in her intense and vulnerable images of womanhood, J.M. Cameron's freedom of expression was as elaborate as her condition of life – that of a wife and a mother – was controlled. In each portrait, her viewpoint on the generosity of motherly love (*Day Spring*), on women's love life (*Pre-Raphaelite Study*), on beauty (*Alethea*), or on subversive passion (*The Parting of Lancelot and Guinevere*) is counterbalanced by surrogacy, melancholy, death and separation. Within her production, these borderline portraits reveal under their new sensuous attitudes J.M. Cameron's powerful defiance when she dared question the fragility of love and desire or the limits of her role as an artist, with an elegance that made her reach eternity.

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## Beneath the Surface: Sleeping Beauties in Representations of Antiquity and their Reception (1860–1900)

British painting in the mid-1860s saw a prominent renewal of paintings of antiquity that was to last until the early twentieth century. The painters concerned have sometimes been referred to as ‘Olympians’, ‘Neoclassical’ or ‘Parnassians’<sup>1</sup> because of their academicism, their return to classic forms and their promotion of noble ideals. Recent specialists have placed some of these painters – mostly Frederic Leighton and Albert Moore – within the broader Aesthetic Movement.<sup>2</sup> However, both categories are problematic. First, neither completely accommodates painters such as Lawrence Alma-Tadema or Edward Poynter, who produced a kind of historical *genre* painting similar to that in vogue in France.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the term ‘Olympian’ connotes a serene and luminous Greece which is more akin to the Hellenism that art historians such as Winckelmann envisioned: this idealized and sanitized concept, therefore, precludes the darker and more complex elements of Greece which these painters in fact took into account in their works. Then, the inscription within the Aesthetic, or ‘Art for Art’s Sake’, Movement posits the primacy of the formal qualities of painting at the expense of subject, and yet these painters were highly concerned with literary, dramatic, historical or mythological subjects, even though they sometimes explored Aesthetic principles. Finally, beyond the

1 See Christopher Wood, *Olympian Dreamers: Victorian Classical Painters, 1860–1914* (London: Constable, 1983), 15–32.

2 See Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Art for Art’s Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007).

3 Notably the French ‘*Néo-grec*’ painters Gérôme, Hamon and Picou.

formal beauty and the noble ideals these painters wanted to attain, their works express concerns for inner conflicts and hidden pulses which neither term – ‘Olympian’ or ‘Aesthetic’ – completely accounts for.

One of the privileged themes of that painting is the representation of sleeping women. The sleeping figure is sometimes presented by some of these painters as a purely formal motif, in accordance with the principles of Aestheticism; however, it also carries symbolical and erotic connotations because of the pose and the treatment of the body and clothing. The sleeping figure is closed in on her intimacy and interiority and there is no interaction with the spectator. If this beholder is assumed to be male, he may therefore freely project his desire onto her. In that case, the presentation is ambivalent – and so is the participation of the spectator – for the frontier between sleep, eroticism and death is porous.

The representation of sleep also provides an access to the unconscious: the contorted poses and the sleeping bodies express buried dreams and desires. This was in keeping with the context: the contemporary advances in psychology and anthropology here meet the revaluation of Greece then taking place in classic studies and archaeology. The vision of Greece was still divided between the construct of a ‘white’ Greece that had ideological, political, racist and gendered resonances on the one hand and the newer approaches that reappraised the chthonian, Eleusinian or Dionysian dimensions of Greece on the other hand. The divide was between the notion of an immaculate, idealized Greece – whether in its conception of art or of man – and a darker, more disquieting vision that accepted the savage elements of rites and the role of colour in sculpture. Notably, the painters associated to the revival of Greek forms were highly influenced by these contemporary reappraisals of Greece.

The representations of sleeping women either drawn from Greek subjects (such as mythology) or influenced by Greek forms reflect such divide. The female figure is inscribed within a prestigious academic and iconographic tradition that posits the primacy of classic forms, which accounts for her sculptural treatment and her draperies; but her body is also an object of erotic fascination while sleep evokes the realm of the mysterious and the uncontrolled. Her body becomes the site of a collision between Ideal Beauty and the libidinal. Underneath the codified and widely accepted

pictorial treatment of the figure, signs of unconscious desires irrupt. This painting, therefore, reflects concerns pertaining to the body, to sexuality and to the hidden recesses of the mind. What is more, such concerns are also present in the critical and journalistic reception of this painting.

The late Victorian painters of the Antique found inspiration both from Greek statuary and from Renaissance painting, which confers a sensual note to their feminine figures, who are thus poised between an overt idealization and a mild sexualization. But establishing a clear divide between the classical form and the graphic expression of fantasy is not totally possible and so the body of the sleeping woman lies between the idealizing classical discourse and the fleshly reality of the body offered for consumption. The repressed returns from beneath the smooth, sculptural surface, despite the iconographical and discursive 'vesture' that clothes the figure, to take up Didi-Huberman's arguments about the impossibility to completely dissociate form and desire.<sup>4</sup> The painters indeed wanted to renew with the elevated subjects and noble forms of the Antique, sometimes referring to Ideal Beauty and to noble passions, and such a choice is supposed to entail an operation of desexualization. However, the tone and discourse present in the critical reception of this painting show that what is at stake in such painting is desire and the body. Indeed, the critical discourses pertaining to such works purport a verbalization of the repressed fantasies at work in this 'Olympian' painting.

Many of these painters took up the subject of the sleeping Ariadne, which has often traditionally conflated eroticism and dream. Many Greek vases represent Ariadne when Dionysus discovers her or when she reclines with him; some vases, frescoes or sculptures show her asleep. G.F. Watts made various paintings of a semi-nude or draped Ariadne, who is shown seated on the rocks, alone or with attendants. She is awake and often aware of the coming of Dionysus and his retinue. Prowling leopards, animals symbolizing pagan energy and sensuality, announce the irruption of the

4 See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ouvrir Vénus: Nudité, rêve, cruauté* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002).

god.<sup>5</sup> In 1863, he devised another version of the subject that shows Ariadne sleeping,<sup>6</sup> which exudes a blatant eroticism because of the languorous pose of Ariadne and the sensuality of the texture. Other painters chose to represent her as the woman abandoned by Theseus, moaning, lamenting or sending imprecations to the sea, and sometimes acting as an excuse for the representation of the nude.<sup>7</sup> Yet she is never represented with her divine mate.

In their study of Leighton, Leonée and Richard Ormond state that he was haunted by the symbolism of sleep, especially by its stillness and by the idea of 'death-in-life' as 'a suspended state, which may or may not prefigure movement, or may move towards death.'<sup>8</sup> They also acknowledge the eroticism of his representations, an element that surges up in contemporary reviews of his works. Leighton's version of the subject of Ariadne is highly ambivalent: she seems to be sleeping yet the title<sup>9</sup> tells a different story. Leighton indeed refers to another version of the myth in which Ariadne dies. His figure is modelled after the 'Vatican Ariadne',<sup>10</sup> although the original position of the sculpted figure is slightly altered: she lies on the rocks, her body forming a straight diagonal, and her bosom is entirely covered by a drapery. What the artist aims at is the sense of definitive passivity brought about by death and not the pause of sleep before the return to sensual bliss. However, despite the rigidity of death, the female form invites an erotic contemplation.

5 Watts, who admired the Elgin marbles of the British Museum, modelled his different versions of *Ariadne* on the three goddesses of the Parthenon.

6 G.F. Watts, *Ariadne* (1863). Oil on canvas, 36.1 × 76.8 cm. Private collection.

7 See William Blake Richmond's *Lament of Ariadne* (exh. 1872), Evelyn de Morgan's *Ariadne in Naxos* (1877), *Ariadne in Naxos* by Henrietta Rae (1885) and *Ariadne* by Herbert Draper (1905).

8 Leonée and Richard Ormond, *Lord Leighton* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 131.

9 Frederic Leighton, *Ariadne abandoned by Theseus; watches for his return. Artemis releases her by Death* (1868). Oil on canvas, 101 × 157 cm. Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad, India.

10 *Sleeping Ariadne* (100 AD). Roman copy of the Hellenistic marble sculpture of the second century BC, Vatican Museums.

The theatrical presentation of the figure should be taken into account: the title reads like a stage direction; a flat background evokes a backdrop; and the figure is positioned like an actress placed on the front stage, her body and head enhanced by a dark greenish drapery. Her overdramatic face expresses pathos and she adopts the affected pose of a tragedian. The colours of the painting contribute to the tragic dimension: the skyline above her creates a horizontal line that encloses her and is hardly relieved by the harsh jagged lines of the mountains on the left. The water has a dark violet colour that harmonizes with the sad brown shades of her drapery and the sombre hues of the vegetation. The colour of the sky is dull and matches the dry rocky platform; it contrasts with her very luminous white dress and her pale skin, which seem lit by an artificial light. There is much ambivalence in the treatment of the figure: her very pale skin and rigid pose point to death, but her transparent robe and smooth limbs invite the spectator to the voyeuristic contemplation of a beautiful body. Leighton's version of the myth excludes the possibility for Ariadne to meet Dionysus and to accede to the pleasures of the senses; in its place, Artemis, the goddess of virginity, petrifies her beauty into death. She is frozen, pure and statue-like, which is why Leighton selects white for her drapery, instead of the sensual red colour chosen by Waterhouse, De Morgan or Richmond for their representations of Ariadne.

Some critics were particularly fascinated by this freezing touch. According to William Michael Rossetti, for example, the deadly stasis that follows Ariadne's intense longing for Theseus is salutary: 'this woman has died of the very weariness of daily renewed grief. But the calm now is as profound as the yearning heretofore', which is why he notes 'a sensation of stationariness, as if Phoebus Apollo might be pausing in heaven to see how his sister Artemis has accomplished her mercy upon the outworn Ariadne'.<sup>11</sup> Desire for Theseus is met by death, but this is envisioned in terms of a relief. The same rhetoric is present in the anonymous review for the *Art-Journal*: 'life tranquilly ebbs away from the figure; the drooping

11 William Michael Rossetti, *Notes on the Royal Academy exhibition, 1868* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1868), 12.

wrist and pendent finger are as the fading and falling of a flower when life is spent. Rest, eternal repose, after earth's turmoil, is the spirit the artist has cast over the scene. [...] Artemis at length releases Ariadne from her misery'.<sup>12</sup> The critic expresses a curious kind of death wish as relief from pain is only brought about by death; yet this does not prevent the critic from appreciating the body parts of the beautiful figure.

F.G. Stephens, writing anonymously for the *Athenaeum*, uses a striking simile to refer to her death: 'Ariadne lying in royal beauty, just as life passed from her, rather than death came to conquer so sweet a form.'<sup>13</sup> The traditional conqueror, Dionysus, has indeed been excluded. Besides, her morbidity is seen as a source of beauty. 'Royal as she was in regal ease of dying, with ordered feet placed together, and limbs as though they rested. [...] Fair she is, with a noble face and lips that are paler than their wont since their corners sank; the eyelids sheathed imperial eyes and all the haughty lines of loveliness relaxed on cheek and throat and bosom.'<sup>14</sup> Like many of her contemporary sleeping sisters conquered by death and not by a man, her very rigidity originates a highly ambivalent erotic contemplation. Unlike many of his other sleeping figures, such as *Cymon and Iphigenia* or the figure of *Flaming June*, Leighton's *Ariadne* is an object of desire that is safely located in death. And while many representations of sleeping beauties posit the presence of a beholder either situated in the pictorial space – the man who contemplates her and who will wake her up and therefore awaken her senses – or displaced onto symbolical elements – Dionysus/Bacchus represented by his animals or Zeus assuming an elemental shape – the erotic potential of the sleeping woman is also addressed to the spectator of the painting, most often presumed to be male.

12 'The Royal Academy', *Art-Journal* 7 (1 June 1868), 101–10, 105.

13 [F.G. Stephens], 'Royal Academy', *Athenaeum* 2114 (2 May 1868), 632.

14 *Ibid.*

J.W. Waterhouse devised his *Ariadne*<sup>15</sup> as a tribute to Leighton's painting,<sup>16</sup> but he chose life and Eros instead of Thanatos. He too was inspired by the Vatican sculpture but unlike Leighton, Waterhouse kept the languorous positions of the arms and head as well as the drapery uncovering her right breast.<sup>17</sup> He used colour symbolism to accentuate her robe which stresses the sensuality of the sleeping figure; the deep red provides a warm note that matches the voluptuous treatment of the textures. As in Leighton's *Flaming June*, her desirable body radiates and is enhanced by the clinging drapery. The symbolical bright light of dawn illumines the mountains and announces the return of bliss. Waterhouse takes up the same spatial disposition as in his *Saint Cecilia* (1895): the figure is no longer placed on the shore or on a rocky promontory but on a terrace which occupies the foreground; the background shows the port and Theseus's sailing ship. The perspective is derived from Italian paintings of the Quattrocento. This explains why F.G. Stephens saw a difference of treatment between Leighton's classicism and Waterhouse's return to the Renaissance: "The dead "Ariadne" of Leighton furnishes a curious example of the purely classical way of regarding the subject. Leighton's conception of the theme is that of a Greek of a Roman epoch; the present picture is the offspring of Florence, but has a dash of Lombard directness".<sup>18</sup> To Stephens, this 'directness' probably implies a more straightforward sensuality. Many elements express reverie and erotic longing rather than sleep. Ariadne's body and feet are tense. Desire and animalism are displaced onto the leopards, animals associated to Bacchus and his maenads; one of them is sleeping, quietly curled around

15 John William Waterhouse, *Ariadne* (1898). Oil on canvas, 91 × 151 cm. private collection. See <[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/97/John\\_William\\_Waterhouse\\_Ariadne.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/97/John_William_Waterhouse_Ariadne.jpg)> (all images accessed August 2013).

16 Waterhouse admired and emulated Leighton and saw the retrospective held after his death in 1897; see Peter Trippi, *J.W. Waterhouse* (London: Phaidon, 2002), 152–7.

17 Ariadne adopts the position seen in many antique representations of sleeping figures of Ariadne or maenads in vases and sculptures – with one arm placed over the reclining woman's head and often resting on the other arm.

18 [F.G. Stephens], "The Royal Academy (First Notice)", *Athenaeum* 3679 (April 30, 1898), 572.

her footstool, while the other one is approaching both the sleeping panther and the woman; the cat, therefore, signals Dionysus's imminent irruption and his power to arouse desire. As in much Symbolist art, such paintings of the Antique, therefore, draw on mythology to express sexual fantasy.

Although Leighton sometimes experienced with paintings that aimed at beauty for its own sake and so showed his interest for Aesthetic principles, he was nevertheless eager to represent recognizable subjects and themes. He regularly mentioned in his writings and letters that 'classic forms' are timeless, 'abstract' and therefore perfect. *Summer Moon* (1872)<sup>19</sup> has therefore been classified among his 'Aesthetic' works, in which only the formal qualities count. When it was exhibited, the journalist of the *Academy* described it as 'a pictorial poem' in which 'two young women have fallen asleep curled against each other' and in which '[e]very sweeping line of drapery, every shade of colour, combine in one lovely harmony'.<sup>20</sup> However, this decorative treatment of the figures was rejected by many critics, among others Henry Morley: 'I can see only the loveliest of wall ornaments [...] I find in them deliciousness of form and colour, nothing more. "Summer Moon" is a sort of flower painting with forms of fair women for the flowers'.<sup>21</sup> Still, Morley uncovers the gendered ambivalence that is at stake in the purely formal and decorative treatment of the female figure: such aesthetics turns the sleeping women into objects offered for the beholder's contemplation – into flowers, so to say, and Morley's image is certainly highly connoted.

Many critics ambivalently concentrated on the formal qualities of the work while dwelling on the eroticism of the women, which is enhanced by their passiveness. Sidney Colvin, for one, refers to the work as the 'choicest and most poetical piece of pure decorative work, in the classical spirit', and then evokes the physical beauty of 'that lovely and solemn group of two women who lie coiled side by side draped in wine-colour, and steeped in

19 Frederic Leighton, *Summer Moon* (ca. 1872). Oil on canvas, 100.3 × 128.3 cm. Private collection. See <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/35935/35935-h/35935-h.htm#imagep193a>>.

20 [F.G. Stephens], 'Note on the fine arts: Leighton's *Summer Moon*', *Academy* 3 (April 15, 1872), 148.

21 Henry Morley, 'Pictures at the Royal Academy', *Fortnightly Review* 11 (1872), 701.



sleep, with popped weight and warmth in the rhythmical repose of their large and tender limbs'.<sup>22</sup> He evokes the *topos* of the stupor induced by drug (the poppy connotes laudanum) or by alcohol (with the term 'wine-colour'). Besides, his description of the 'coiled' women is a near-verbalization of the Sapphic fantasy that may be suggested by the representation. The treatment of the two interlocked female bodies allows participation from a presumably male beholder. Indeed, despite the recurrent allusions to the painter's interest in formal beauty and to his quest for musical harmony, many critics were particularly inspired by the poses and the sleeping attitudes of the models, which are evocative of mystery and eroticism.

Stephens, for example, insists on the purely 'aesthetic' dimension of the work:

Not so much is aimed at in Moonlight; but there is not less Art displayed [...]; the poetic inspiration is beyond question; the whole work is in perfect harmony with itself – a great quality in Art, and how little understood! Here are colours of the greatest and most delicate intensity, breadth, broad tone, chiaroscuro of the subtlest, such a noble grouping of the figures, such grand suavity of line, and a composition so melodious, if one may employ a term which is unfairly monopolized by music, that the company of such a masterpiece is exalting, delightful, purifying.<sup>23</sup>

There seems to be an effort on the part of the critic to justify the nobility of that representation: words like 'noble' and the allusion to the 'purifying' effect on the beholder concur to legitimize a subject that is not validated by any reference to myth or history; still, the painting opens up a whole realm of fantasy, precisely because it only depicts sleeping women curling up against each other. The inscription of that painting within the academic tradition is not self-evident, and so using the discourse of Aestheticism was an alternative way to justify a subject that contains a highly erotic dimension.

22 Sidney Colvin, 'Pictures in London and Paris, 1872', *Cornhill Magazine* 26 (July 1872), 41.

23 [F.G. Stephens], 'The Royal Academy (First Notice)', *Athenaeum* 2323 (4 May 1872), 564.

Leighton's sleeping women are often akin to the mysterious and voluptuous female sleepers of Symbolist art. In *Summer Slumber* (ca. 1894)<sup>24</sup> a woman is sleeping on a bench that is flanked by two bas-reliefs of sleeping figures. One enigmatic standing statue bids the witnessing spectator to hush up, while another statue represents a sleeping woman, so that there is a *mise en abyme* of the theme of sleep. The sculptures of sleeping figures are modelled after Michelangelo's Vatican frescoes, such as the massive Sibyls, who wear hoods and are constricted within a square space, and they contrast with the sleeping woman, who lies horizontally and whose hair is let loose. A whole realm of dreams and fantasies is suggested: the undulating folds of her vesture emphasize the voluptuous lines of her body; her gown and the drapery on which she rests seem literally to flow out of her body – as if some fluid energy was escaping from her body while she is sleeping. This is a recurrent motif in Leighton's painting.

Stephens dwells on the sensual depiction of the sleeping beauty who is envisioned as a 'virginal' woman offered to male scrutiny:

Several weeks ago, we very briefly described 'Summer Slumber', a Greek room lined with marble, adorned with statues of 'Silence' and 'Repose,' and other sculptures of subjects suggestive of peace and slumber. [...] This landscape is as restful in its sentiment as the nearly life-size figure of a young damsel extended supine upon the margin of a marble tank filled with water, which reflects the darker azure of the sky without, while its colour has been ably harmonized with the pale auburn of her hair and the deep tender rose of her draperies. These draperies [...] veil, without concealing, the fine lines of her body and her virginal contours. Her limbs and face are charmingly drawn, and modelled with delicate research.<sup>25</sup>

The critic places himself in the position of the spectator contemplating a sensually passive virgin; he seems particularly titillated by the woman who sleeps innocently. His discourse oscillates between his general impression that the picture is 'warm' and elements that tone down its emotional charge,

24 Private collection. See <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/35935/35935-h/35935-h.htm#imagep316a>>.

25 [F.G. Stephens], 'The Royal Academy (First Notice)', *Athenaeum* 3471 (May 5, 1894), 583.

such as the 'pale auburn' of her hair and the 'tender rose' of her draperies. However, the critic's evocation of the voluptuous shapes of the sleeper contrasts with the soothing effect that such a representation of repose is supposed to procure. This prose thus functions like Winckelmann's ambivalent rhetoric of the purifying effect of idealized Greek forms, which is constantly annihilated by the erotic responsiveness to the fragmented parts of the sculpted body.

Leighton took up the figure of the right-hand bas-relief to devise the composition of *Flaming June*.<sup>26</sup> The body occupies the whole space of the canvas and is again inspired by Greek sculpture and by Michelangelo's frescoes. The title and the bright dress of the sleeping figure evoke the themes of heat and passion. The chromatic arrangement is based on warm colours: the bright orange colour of her gown; the red hues of the drapery and flowers; the auburn colour of her hair. The transparent gown reveals the contours of the body, mostly her bosom and thighs. Prettejohn sees this painting as another example of Leighton's exploration of the principles of Art for Art's sake: there is no reference to a clear modern social context and the body carries 'its meaning within itself'.<sup>27</sup>

However, besides this notable 'Aestheticist' dimension, the painting also belongs to Symbolism. The theme of sleep evokes the buried realm of dreams and of the unconscious, which enhances the erotic presentment of the woman's body. Despite the theme of rest, the compressed body, crossed by the diagonal thigh, is full of tension. Her vesture, moreover, literally flames outward towards the spectator. She is not the usual virginal girl clad in white who sleeps in utter abandonment.

Leighton's anecdote about the composition, which frequently recurs in reviews or monographs of his work, seems hardly believable: he mentions that he was charmed by the pose of a model who was having a rest, which he transposed into a quick drawing. Yet the composition seems clearly inspired by Michelangelo's destroyed painting *Leda*, of which only

26 Frederic Leighton, *Flaming June* (ca. 1895). Oil on canvas, 119 × 119 cm. Museo de Arte de Ponce, Puerto Rico.

27 Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake*, 146.

drawings or sketches are left, as well as engraved or painted copies by other artists.<sup>28</sup> In these, the prominent thigh occupies the first plane of the canvas; in Leighton's painting, it creates a horizontal line that divides the composition. Interestingly, the theme of Leda and the swan has traditionally been treated as an erotic painting: in Michelangelo's version, Leda is lying and is literally copulating with the swan, his beak placed against her mouth and his wing on her crotch. Her eyes look downwards but she is not sleeping. One oil copy in the National Gallery, which Leighton may have seen, shows a crimson drapery beneath her whose shape and folds evoke female genitals. Leighton removed the erotic theme and the phallic swan and slightly altered the position of the body and arms, only keeping the Michelangelesque contorted figure and the large thigh. But he was unmistakably inspired by an overtly erotic painting.

In fact, Leighton displaces the erotic overtones onto other elements. The sea that can be glimpsed above her reflects the sun. Although the figure seems to be sleeping, the rippling drapery beneath her expresses the inner world of dreams and desire: it glows with a bright orange colour that connotes passion; again, this drapery looks like a kind of liquid flow of bodily energies oozing out of her body. Despite her languor, probably induced by the heat of June, the posture of her body and the placing her feet all point to muscular tension: one foot evokes the dancing foot of maenads, or of the *Gradiva*,<sup>29</sup> while the rectilinear folds of the drapery enhance the projection of the other foot.

Notwithstanding its smooth academic texture, Leighton's painting deals with desire. The sleeping figure seems inaccessible and shut in her inner world of dreams and fantasies; but her body is contorted by erotic anticipation. This element was to be later uncovered by Klimt, whose *Danaë*<sup>30</sup>

28 Michelangelo's *Leda* follows the same composition as *Night*, one of the marble statues on the tomb of Giuliano de Medici in San Lorenzo Church (Florence). There were copies by the Rosso Fiorentino and Rubens as well as by later sculptors, such as Bartolomeo Ammanati.

29 *Gradiva* (4th century BC). Greek bas-relief, Roman copy, Chiaramonti museum of Vatican.

30 Klimt, *Danaë* (1907). Oil on canvas, 77 × 83 cm. Galerie Würthle, Vienna.

is clearly inspired by Leighton's composition and chromatic choices: both paintings use warm colours, orange and crimson, which denote passion; the golden rain is a variation on Leighton's representation of the golden light of the sun showering down on the woman. But Klimt further unveils the erotic dimension of Leighton's picture by transposing this sleeping woman into Danaë, whose myth was close to Leda's in that both were inseminated by Zeus, either in the shape of a swan or of rain. In between, Leighton had already transposed Michelangelo's representation: Leda, impregnated by the swan, is remodelled as a sleeping woman who languorously receives the sensual rays of the sun god.

This erotic element titillated some of its commentators. Stephens, in the *Athenaeum*, perceives signs of passion in the figure, despite the theme of sleep: 'Her face is flushed in sleep, and the broad and heavy eyelids lie close upon her cheek, while the full lips part'.<sup>31</sup> The term 'flushed' evokes signs of inner agitation, and the critic then alludes to the 'intense red' of the drapery underneath her, described as 'the highest key-note of the chromatic scheme' and emphasizing the undercurrent theme. 'The idea which is embodied in the sumptuous figure of the sleeper is sustained by the fervid coloration of the dress and by the general tenor of the landscape'.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the idea that he refers to here is not so much that of repose as that of emotion and fever.

Claude Phillips, in the *Academy*, dwells on the figure lit up by the shine of the sun on the sea, which to him reveals the presence of the sun god. He emphasizes the voluptuousness of the woman, which is made acceptable by the classic theme:

[A] most laboriously worked-out study of a damsel in semi-transparent draperies of flame-colour, which cling to her statuesque form in the fashion made familiar by Greek sculpture. She takes her mid-day siesta in the most uncomfortable and

31 [F.G. Stephens], 'The Royal Academy (First Notice)', *Athenaeum* 3523 (4 May 1895), 576.

32 *Ibid.*

complicated attitude that could well be devised, just sheltered by an awning from the arrows of the sun-god, whose full blaze falls upon the sea glowing like molten brass.<sup>33</sup>

Yet such protection from the sun does not seem to protect her from the intrusion of the god, who has caused her draperies to literally melt. This interpretation, which highlights the god's effect on the damsel, must have impressed Phillips for he took it up in another article:

That inconstant divinity, the sun, in his impersonal form, is also the hero of his 'Flaming June,' if the statuesque damsel in her semi-transparent vesture of flame colour is its heroine. The sunlight on southern seas is here unfortunately more like molten brass than impalpable gold.<sup>34</sup>

Like Danaë, who welcomes Zeus in the form of the gold shower, the sleeping figure seems to be tranquilly yet intensely waiting for the showering of the god's blessings on her. There is therefore something beyond the purely formal representation of that sleeping woman: despite the 'Aesthetic' discourse that posits the idea that the body is a motif among others, such dissociation is in fact impossible.

Albert Moore was also particularly inspired by the theme of sleeping women clad in Greco-Roman draperies. His decorative and sculptural figures are often lost in their reveries, to which the beholders do not have access. Yet, despite the painter's avowed adherence to Aestheticism, such representations are sites of conflicting desires too. The figure's almost erotic abandonment collides with the sense of stillness. These figures modelled on the serene statues of classical Greece, with static bodies and inexpressive faces, are nevertheless invested by desire. Their bodies are clad in draperies that enhance the many undulating and rectilinear lines of the painting. This was meant to underline the geometrical and optical effects he aimed at, which was mostly founded on precise chromatic arrangements; and yet the draperies and bodies also express inner tension and expectancy. The figures seem quiet and yet they are also animated by strange reveries

33 Claude Phillips, 'The Royal Academy II', *Academy* 47 (25 May 1895), 449.

34 Claude Phillips, 'Pictures of the year (No. I): the Royal Academy and the New Gallery', *Fortnightly Review* 63 (57) (June 1895), 932–3.

and dreams. The idealized classical clothing of the figures does not totally cover the desirable bodies; nor does it conceal the mysterious workings of the psyche. Inertia is aimed at, and yet movement irrupts. The silence of sculpture contrasts with the language of the body.

Comyns Carr mentions the main 'principles' that are at the basis of Moore's works:

[...] that art in its highest flight can take no account of the passions or fortunes of human life, but that it must devote itself exclusively to the rendering of physical beauty, and of those unconscious movements of the body which are made without thought or reflection, and are not associated with any particular emotion. As the eye penetrates deeper into the waters of a lake when the surface is calm and smooth, so Mr Moore believes that the artist can discover more of the beauty of humanity when it is undisturbed by passion or suffering. He therefore strives to preserve in the faces that he paints an expression constantly happy and tranquil, and he chooses for the interpretation of form only those gestures that are abstract and unconscious.<sup>35</sup>

Carr points to a paradox in the painter's representations of bodies. His art is supposed to deal with exterior form only, yet those 'unconscious movements' he refers to contradict that idea and seem to indicate that something is working beneath the surface. Indeed, something – thoughts, emotions, drives or pulses – seems to be lurking beneath the quiet waters. Carr's simile of the water is interesting when placed in the context of Symbolist art, in which water is often associated with woman: it indeed often connotes the mystery of womanhood and it symbolizes the hidden recesses of the mind.

The bodies of Moore's sleepers betray many 'unconscious movements', to take up Carr's expression, and these may be interpreted as marks of tension and desire. In *A Palm Fan* (1875),<sup>36</sup> the single sleeping figure seems to be reclining languorously and serenely. But one soon notices a number of 'movements': the woman's right arm clutches the back of the sofa; the fingers of her left arm are far from limp; her legs are held close together; her feet

35 Joseph W. Comyns Carr, *Examples of Contemporary Art: Etchings from Representative Works by Living English and Foreign Artists* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1878), 16.

36 Albert Moore, *A Palm Fan*, 1875, oil on canvas, private collection, 16.5 × 26.6 cm.

are squeezing the blue cloth beneath her. The many straight creases of the draperies provide tension and create a counterpoint to the sinuous lines of the figure. The woman averts her face; her transparent gown enhances her voluptuous bosom and hip. White and yellowish glazes accentuate the soft texture and graceful line of her vesture. Moore's technique was to adjust a body within a geometrical grid, and so the angles and lines of her arms and legs form a criss-cross pattern that parallel the numerous straight lines of the painting. Yet, far from being immobile and rectilinear, her whole body is animated by flowing movements that contrast with the vertical, horizontal or diagonal lines of the couch and draperies.

In his review of the picture, W.M. Rossetti insists on its 'Aesthetic' qualities; but he also lingers on her desirable body. The girl he contemplates is 'distended on a sofa, with very visible contours through gauzy drapery, and pale-blue as the predominant colour'.<sup>37</sup> However, desire for the represented subject becomes yearning for the art object. 'This is a covetable little piece of art'.<sup>38</sup> Rossetti was not the only one who saw such a body as a more or less eroticized figure, despite the inertness of sleep. Indeed, the woman's pose imparts a strong seductive character to her. Moreover, although the attention is transferred onto the objects and props that surround the sleeping figure, thus further blurring the investment with her, objects such as fan, jewels or fruit are feminine attributes. Moore often chose to focus on objects that could divest his paintings of any connotations, yet such motifs reinforced their connotative potential. Furthermore, the figure's self-absorption makes her both an object of desire as well as a desiring subject.

A similar composition recurs in *Acacias*.<sup>39</sup> The painting is divided into several horizontal compartments on which her draped body seems to have been pasted. The female model adopts a highly uncomfortable sitting position on a couch, and her head is uneasily placed within a square cup

37 William Michael Rossetti, 'The Royal Academy Exhibition (Second Notice)', *Academy* 7 (May 15, 1875), 514.

38 *Ibid.*

39 Albert Moore, *Acacias* (exh. 1882). Oil on canvas, 58.4 × 31.1 cm. Carnegie Museum of Art.



formed by her arms. Her zigzagging body is even more geometrical than in the preceding canvas and so the position of the body and the placing of the limbs point to the impossibility of sleep. And despite his pure aesthetic aims, 'unconscious movements' are again at work beneath the still, inexpressive surface of the sculptural figure.

Frederick Wedmore, in the *Academy*, expresses a deep ambivalence towards the painted figure. He rapturously notes some signs of emotion on her face while pointing to the beneficial effects of sleep: "Acacias" shows us one of the girls who [...], soft, flushed, and warm, [is] overcome so happily with the gracious sleep of childhood.<sup>40</sup> Passion is evacuated, and sleep seems to have the beneficial effect of quieting down all emotions and relocating the woman into the safe space of childish innocence. Espousing the principles of Aestheticism – which emphasized the harmony of the composition and the beauty of lines and colour – seems to legitimize more or less erotic representations, exactly as the recourse to the idealizing discourse of classicism justified painters in their choice of the nude: 'Mr Moore's art is an art of refined luxury. [...] But there is rest and satisfaction in it. His world has the repose of lovely line, and the delight of faultless colour'.<sup>41</sup> But the objectification of the female figure and her pacification through sleep do not totally preclude its potentially erotic charge. Through his motifs and compositions indeed, Moore sets off a chain of thoughts in a way that resembles much Symbolist art: a butterfly or a flower may evoke the themes of the soul, of life or of a renaissance.<sup>42</sup> Moore's motifs were inspired by Greek or Japanese art, but beyond his formal choices and his Aesthetic principles, his representations of sleeping women have a distant kinship to the contemporary Symbolist female archetypes.

A number of these representations of sleeping women, then, suggest the presence of a male beholder of the figure. Lawrence Alma-Tadema,

40 Frederick Wedmore, 'The Grosvenor Gallery', *Academy* 21 (6 May 1882), 326.

41 *Ibid.*

42 The Greek word for butterfly was *psyche*, which also means 'soul', and so the insect here evokes the fleeting soul. In many ancient Mediterranean traditions, the acacia of the painting's title evokes resurrection, eternity or immortality and is present in funerary symbolism.

in his painting *The Women of Amphissa* (1887),<sup>43</sup> went as far as to hint at the potential danger man represents. The painting illustrates a story from Plutarch's *Scripta Moralia*<sup>44</sup> in which a group of votaries of Dionysus from Phocis, the Thyades or Maenads, inadvertently stray into the neighbouring hostile city of Amphissa. Exhausted by their frantic nocturnal Bacchanal, they finally sleep on the marketplace and are discovered by the women of Amphissa in the morning. These, fearing that the soldiers and men of the city should assault the defenceless women, wake them up and accompany them safely out of the city. The artist already tackled the theme of maenads sleeping off a Bacchanalian revel in his *Exhausted Maenides after the Dance* of 1873–4 and *After the Dance* (1875), two instances of Alma-Tadema's erotic depiction of sleeping nudes. Here, he establishes a contrast between the heavily draped matrons of Amphissa and the maenads lying centre stage. The matrons' neat draperies and hair differ from the maenads' dishevelled manes and neglected clothes. Moreover, the animal skins they wear relate them not to humanity but to animalism, while woven clothes refer to human *technè*.

Many commentators of the picture use words pointing alternately to frenzy or to abandon. But when placed next Gleyre's or Bouguereau's bacchantes, Alma-Tadema's were far less erotic or unruly. Claude Phillips was among the critics who were aware of that. Although he admires them, the maenads look too orderly and pure, and therefore hardly plausible:

In the present instance it is impossible not to admire the consummate skill with which is disposed the artfully-artless group or chain of these so-called Maenads, of whom some appear prone, some half-standing, some half-lying, in the most cunningly varied attitudes, having yet a certain unity as a whole. Very beautiful are many of the golden-haired priestesses, too fresh and cool in their unsmirched purity to suggest

43 Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *The Women of Amphissa* (1887). Oil on canvas, 129 × 182.9 cm. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA.

44 See Rosemary J. Barrow, *Lawrence Alma-Tadema* (London: Phaidon, 2001), 130–4, and Vern G. Swanson, *The Biography and Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings of Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema* (London: Garter & Co. in association with Scolar Press, 1990), 69 and 173.

exhausted devotees of Dionysos, left powerless now that the frenzy, against which to strive is vain, has died away.<sup>45</sup>

Despite their animal skins, their immaculate white gowns jar with their traditional image, and this is why Phillips estimates that the artist has failed to depict 'the dramatic contrast between the Maenads, no longer possessed with a Bacchic fury, but bearing still its traces, and the unmoved calm, tempered with sweet pity, of the women of Amphissa'.<sup>46</sup> The Maenads are too innocent and pure and the 'clash of human passion'<sup>47</sup> that is expected from such subject is consequently missing. Some spectators, then, seem to have found such a representation too tame to their tastes.

Other critics were quite receptive to the voluptuousness of the reclining figures, as is the case with Stephens, who, in the *Athenaeum*, lingers on the women's abandoned bodies:

We particularly admire the girl who lies, fast asleep, on a skin in the foreground, her finely drawn limbs, her handsome face still flushed with the excitement of yesterday, and the excellent colouring and modelling of her flesh, especially of her legs and feet.<sup>48</sup>

The critic emphasizes the signs of emotion on the women's faces and his gaze is arrested by the various parts of their bodies. He even recognizes one of the models, 'a favourite actress noted for her beauty'.<sup>49</sup> 'Olympian' artists often used famous actresses as models, whose dramatic poses reinforced the theatricality of their compositions. Alma-Tadema's composition is indeed highly theatrical: the foreground looks like a stage; the women in the background seem to come from wings situated on the left; the walls form a backdrop at the far end of the stage.

45 Claude Phillips, 'The Royal Academy', *Academy* 31 (7 May 1887), 330–2: 331.

46 *Ibid.*

47 *Ibid.*

48 [F.G. Stephens], 'The Royal Academy (First Notice)', *Athenaeum* 3105 (30 April 1887), 581.

49 *Ibid.*

But Stephens also expressed some reservations about the subject, which to him is 'not the happiest he could have made',<sup>50</sup> probably because it evokes the threat of men's violence upon women, such as the fear of rape. Yet, Alma-Tadema complicates the drama: his maenads are both objects of men's assaults and sources of danger to the matrons. To Hedreen,<sup>51</sup> the painting implies that the matrons fear the potential danger that the maenads may represent, as they were traditionally associated with frenzy and savagery. Stephens indeed notes that the women of Amphissa are wary of the Thyades: 'the graceful group of the young dames [are] on guard in the middle distance.'<sup>52</sup> They were indeed renowned for their irrational practices, such as tearing up animals when intoxicated or even killing men, such as Orpheus and Pentheus, during fits of folly. However, Alma-Tadema may in fact be pointing to another idea. As some of his paintings show, he was highly interested in the potential effects of Bacchanalian contagion on orderly women; what he possibly hints at in this canvas is that the pure and ordered matrons could ritually turn into unruly beings. Although the composition is based on several horizontal planes, with each group placed in one, the maenads also form a circle around which the matrons – and so the spectators – are positioned. The maenads, who are lying, sitting or standing, create a kind of centripetal movement that seems ready to encompass the erect women of Amphissa, some of whom already bend towards the maenads. Not all the matrons wear apprehensive looks. Incidentally, the women – and not the bacchantes – give their names to the title of the painting. The theme of the tenuous distance that separates orderly and decent women from riotous bacchantes particularly interested Alma-Tadema. His paintings often suggest that there is no clear-cut frontier between order and disruptiveness, be it in society or in the human psyche. The collapsing bacchante is not placed on the fringes but intrudes upon society precisely because what the artist shows is that any woman might abandon herself to

50 *Ibid.*

51 Guy Hedreen, 'Alma-Tadema's *Women of Amphissa*', *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 52 (3) (1994/1995), 79–92.

52 *Ibid.*

such ritualized loss of control of the body and of the conscience. And this he represents not as threats to male spectators, but as an erotic spectacle.

Alma-Tadema's biographers and the commentators of his works often quote his oral remarks on the analogies he saw between his contemporaries and ancient people. To the critic Cosmo Monkhouse, his canvases do not merely reproduce the past, but are 'pictures of scenes much nearer to us in point of time, and civilisations little different from our own' in which 'old and modern sentiment approach one another'.<sup>53</sup> Yet such analogies were not always acceptable:

We all know that human nature is much the same in all ages, but there is a special delight in being reminded of it pictorially; and this Mr Alma-Tadema does for us more frequently and completely than any other artist. But there is nothing more destructive of the kind of illusion that Mr Alma Tadema desires to produce than palpable modern sentiment.<sup>54</sup>

Such sleeping women, therefore, mirror contemporary revaluations of ancient peoples, no longer posited as ontologically different from contemporary human beings. New anthropological and psychological considerations about the human psyche led to shifts in the visions of man's behaviour and psyche both in the past and in the Victorian present. Alma-Tadema tackled such questions with his peculiar aesthetic approach and pictorial language, in which eroticism plays a large part.

As is the case with Symbolism, such painting of the Antique has to be related with the nineteenth-century advances in psychology, archaeology and anthropology. These representations too draw on Greek mythology so as to explore the world of dreams, pulses and drives that lies beneath the surface – underneath the serene faces of the sleeping women and beneath the apparently smooth forms of the Antique. Ariadne and her 'Aesthetic' sisters, those sleeping beauties with Greco-Roman features, articulate various desires and fantasies and originate a complex erotic participation, while the sleeping maenad evokes animalism, trance, and the loss of control – in

53 Cosmo Monkhouse, 'The Grosvenor Gallery', *Academy* 22 (23 December 1882), 457.

54 *Ibid.*

a context in which the border between the primitive and the modern was increasingly seen as porous.

Underneath the veil – or drapery – of the classical iconographical tradition, such images play with desire and the repressed. Despite the inscription within an academic tradition or an Aesthetic programme to legitimize the representation of the semi-nude, abandoned body of the Grecian sleeping beauty, she remains a troubling object of desire. This Neoclassical or ‘academic’ painting, therefore, has to be situated in a continuity that links the Pre-Raphaelites of the preceding decades, who produced eroticized representations of Sleeping Beauties, and the later movement of European Symbolists. Alongside G.F. Watts, D.G. Rossetti and E. Burne-Jones, who often figure in books on Symbolism, painters like Leighton, Alma-Tadema, or Moore have to be appraised for their symbolist dimension. They, too, were interested in what lay beneath the surfaces, yet with a different technique. To them, Greek myths and classical forms were fit vehicles that enabled them to hint at the world of the human psyche.

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